ALICE BONER

PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION IN HINDU SCULPTURE

CAVE TEMPLE PERIOD

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PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION IN HINDU SCULPTURE

CAVE TEMPLE PERIOD

BY

ALICE BONER

[illegible] पुस्तकालय, लखनऊ
क्रमांक संख्या 1724
प्राप्ति तिथि 12.2.64
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PREFACE

BY

PAUL MUS

Miss Boner's essay on *The Symbolic Aspect of Form*, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, XVII, 1949, already displayed perceptive and constructive qualities seldom found so happily combined in the same author. Her new contribution is a bold and inspiring interpretation of the principles of composition underlying the great reliefs carved out of the live rock on the walls of the famous cave-temples of Western and Southern India. Having on her own account approached and practised the fundamental Hindu technique of Yoga, in its own genuine setting, Miss Boner extends to her readers the benefit of an unusually penetrating perception of her subject matter. On the other hand, equipped as she happens to be with "the trained eye" of the Western artist, her final interpretation profits by the most precise resolution of sculptural and architectonic forms that our extrovert, objective preference may call for.

The result is unique, in this much trodden but still unsettled and provoking field of Indian Art and Archaeology: the principles of composition thus brought to light seem to have been completely overlooked by the previous writers, not excepting such outstanding authorities as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Heinrich Zimmer.

Three leading ideas govern Miss Boner's interpretation:

1) The substratum.... is *a circular field* around a central point, divided by six, eight or twelve diameters and further subdivided by a number of chords running parallel to the diameters.

2) The points where the diameters intersect the circle are connected by vertical and horizontal chords.. This network.. will here be called *Space-division* or Measure.

3) The same points of the circle are further connected by chords running parallel to the oblique diameters.. the lines of this network determine all stresses and movements within the composition and with the movements create the *Time-sequence*.

Space-division and Time-sequence, analytically differenciated, appear nevertheless in all the compositions intimately interwoven.. like warp and woof on a loom. One is static and the other kinetic. The synthesis of both aspects and the meaning that results from it are here called *Integration* and *Interpretation*.

How does this far-reaching analysis compare with previous interpretations? In her *Études d'Art Indien, La Composition plastique dans les bas-reliefs de l'Inde*, Art ancien, Art bouddhique Gupta et post Gupta, Paris, 1942, M. Hallade has drawn attention to the same combination of a static centre and a peripheral display of oblique lines. Though mainly concerned with Buddhist art, she offered some interesting suggestions regarding its Hindu counterpart.

From the fifth century onward, Buddhist and Hindu shrines and monasteries stood close to one another in the same districts and sometimes even on the same spot (Elūrā). Gupta sculpture, taken as a whole, includes productions connected with both schools...

One will find in both

> a certain similarity of purpose and the same eagerness to bring forward a central idea: the power of the cosmic forces, the eternal presence of the deity mark the artistic rendering of the Dance of Śiva, of Viṣṇu's Three Steps or of his Cosmic Slumber, just as in Buddhist shrines one gets a glimpse of the transcendent nature and immutability of the Buddha.

Anticipating some of Miss Boner's remarks Melle Hallade observes that both schools laid stress on the vertical axis of the composition, building it up, as it were, in a central block, supported by a network of vertical and horizontal values (p. 17: Sūrya; cf. pp. 80, 89 etc.), so as to convey an impression of stability. Simultaneously a clever and systematic use of oblique lines and stresses brings movement and animation into the picture (pp. 22, 60, 80, 100 etc.). In the Adoration of the Buddha's Bowl, for instance (p. 57 and fig. 247: Amarāvatī), the composition would present, at first sight, a great variety and contrast of shapes and attitudes; but at closer examination

> they tally with one another on both sides of the medallion. Again and again the eye will meet the same raised arm held at the same angle. The line of an outstretched arm is echoed at the other end of the medaillion by the line of a flying scarf.

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Miss Boner's more elaborate analysis introduces such precisions as "*repetition*" versus "*projection in space*", or "*prolongation*" versus "*echo*"; yet the whole passage is clearly an anticipation of her statement that "a movement hardly ever stands alone... nor is.. confined.. to its own limited extension".

But the parallel cannot be carried further, for perceptive and carefully worked out as it may be, Melle Hallade's list of significant forms stops short of a syntactic interpretation, the one, in fact, that from now on Miss Boner's monography will supply us with.

Another step forward was taken by Melle J. Auboyer's study on *La Composition et la Perspective dans les peintures murales à Ajantā* (Alger, 1949). In close agreement with Miss Boner's conception of the *Circular field*, Melle Auboyer has noticed the ample usage made in ancient and mediaeval Indian art of "a circular form of grouping"; she went even so far as to discern, in some cases, a twin-circle pattern approximating Miss Boner's analysis of the Mahiṣāsuramardinī motif.

Even when the Ajantā compositions are not so distinctly circular as the ones just reviewed, they never fail to present an involuted appearance—like petals curling back in the shape of a chalice—enclosing the central figure with curves along which the eye cannot escape being brought back to that centre..But here again the Ajantā artists have no claim to a first invention: frequent attempts at a circular composition can be seen at Bhārhut; in fact, that kind of composition was later on to come more and more to the front, favored as it was by the medallion frames on the railings, especially at Amarāvatī.

Of course, there is a wide difference between the lotus-shaped medallions of the first Buddhist stūpa and the purely ideal circle governing the composition of the Hindu cave-temple bas-reliefs, as analyzed by Miss Boner; yet a connection may be found in Alfred Foucher's comments on the decoration of the older balustrades at Sāñchī.

At first sight the decoration of the balustrade of Stūpa 2 would seem to be based on the lotus. It is present always and everywhere.. Later on, one would think, an inevitable and legitimate need for variety must have led to the introduction of other subjects. But while giving way to these new themes, the lotus seems at least to have imposed its circular form on them (*The Monuments of Sāñchī*, by Sir John Marshall and Alfred Foucher, vol. I, Calcutta 1946, p. 171)—a suggestion fully endorsed and developed by Mme M. Benisti's *Le médaillon lotiforme dans la sculpture indienne*, Paris 1952.

All this does not by any means minimize, but would rather increase the merits of Miss Boner's remarkable discoveries; keen observers had already been aware of the rhythm and final intention of Indian sculptural and pictorial achievements generally anterior to the ones she deals with here; but hers has been the restitution of the entire inner structure and distribution of the great cave-temple sculptures, a summit of Indian art.

A feature of modern linguistics is its reliance on the sum total of the semantic instance and by an immediate consequence, its denial of any ultimate value to that highly conventional entity, the isolated word. In the same line, Miss Boner's style of interpretation and the results obtained, show how urgently "the figurative form-language of ancient art" needs—and especially in the field of Indian symbolic compositions—a new approach, where mere lists of elementary forms or even paradigms of their term-to-term adjustment ("direct", *i.e.*, vertical-horizontal and "oblique" lines and stresses = "cases") should only be considered prefatory to a fully developed syntax of the sculptural or pictorial "proposition" and of the composite (architectural) "sentence".

In the plastic language of forms, just as in our common language, the semantic whole thus becomes the binding factor and common reference, between the integrated elements. In Miss Boner's own words:

> The circle is always the fundamental determining factor.. Between the centre and the circumference of the circle there is the indissoluble connection of polarity, from which nothing can escape. The movements thrown out by the centre are collected by the circumference and reversed towards the centre, or an unending movement may arise and flow round the circumference, held together by the centre.

The golden rule is accordingly that no element should be allotted any circumstantiated, specific meaning, except in reference to the complete, delimited and well balanced total. It amounts to say that within the relief-field—alias: plastic proposition—the various form-elements should stand in such correlation together that the specific meaning of any one of them, while undoubtedly related to its lexical definition, should also be the outcome of whatever addition, alteration, suppression or correction the others project into it. This comes very close to what an old Brāhmanical treatise, the *Bṛhaddevatā*, calls "reciprocal origination", *anyo' nyayonitvam*, *lit*. "being the matrix (*yoni*, "womb") of one another". Every constituent part thus dovetails in the total—a lexical tenon, so to speak, fitting into its semantic slot.

To reap the full benefit of Miss Boner's revolutionary contribution to our disciplines—meaning the History of Religions as well perhaps as the History of the Fine Arts—it might be useful to compare her thesis to what the previous authorities had to say in that respect. Heinrich Zimmer, in his well-known book *Kunstform und Yoga im Indischen Kultbild*, Berlin 1926 and in his more recent paper on *Some aspects of Time in Indian Art*, *Journ. Ind. Soc. of Oriental Art* I, 1933, wholly disregarded the circular pattern as a binding integrating factor even in the case of the Sāñchī and Bhārhut lotus shaped medallions, where, according to him

> the relief does not actually contain space and the figures are placed like cakes on a round tray . . Still (adds Zimmer) and this is the main point, they are present simultaneously in the mind of the story-teller. . Memory keeps them simultaneously present.

Taking things this way, the meaning does not emerge from an aesthetic synopsis or integration of the work of art as such; it has to be projected over it by an exclusively mental operation of the observer. Even the figurative cult-images would then have to be considered not as artistic creations but as "magical diagrams and nothing but magical diagrams (*yantra*)". Every separate form-element or "isolated word" in its plastic rendering

> seems to be floating in the air, all by itself. . They all enjoy a life of their own and do not depend on any free artistic economy that would govern the detail of their appearance and build them up together, as supporting parts, into a structured whole. The meaning of whatever might appear to be individual in them does not depend on their being related to an artistic total that would control them throughout, turning them all into mere members of an artistic organism.

That so well informed and perceptive an expert should have remained syntax-blind to Indian art is all the more disconcerting as he has endeavoured to contrast this lack of tangible composition with "the bewitching power" of the Western masterpieces, a power that lies, as he rightly says

> in the great richness of correlations leading from any one of the component parts to the rest of them . . . our eye being thus forced up and down the image, approached from all angles in a roundabout way, so that the beholder finds himself again and again constrained to encompass it in an ever reconstructed magic circle.

In the light of the reconstruction suggested in the present book—circular field and leading lines and stresses—to conduct the eye through the composition, Zimmer's description might apply just as well to Indian Art as to the Cnidian Venus or to the Belvedere Apollo—at least as a first step towards a deeper, more philosophical interpretation. To quote our author's last word on the question:

> by merging their shapes into the lines of stress, the figures become the graph of the forces that are in operation.

This is certainly the proper approach and (as the reader will probably soon discover by perusing Miss Boner's illuminating graphs and plates) a very rewarding one.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The present study on the Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture was ready in its substance many years ago. I did not however venture its publication, because I had nothing else to prove the correctness of my thesis, but the visual evidence of geometrical diagrams that had resulted from the analysis of sculptures. There was no theory of composition known to me that could confirm my findings, or at least show that my research had a positive object in view. I knew, that a purely empirical approach, not backed by any acknowledged authority, to a problem that had never so far been seriously studied, was not likely to carry much conviction. In order to find the much needed support for my hypothesis, I searched in all the known Śilpa Śāstra texts for some reference to the principles of sculptural composition. But for a long time I could not find any written documentation of this kind. Even my consultations with eminent scholars did not yield any results, since none of them knew of any text, ancient or modern, that treated this subject either from a theoretical or a practical point of view.

A. K. Coomaraswamy, to whom, among others, I had submitted my problems, encouraged me to describe and publish my observations without waiting for the confirmation of a theoretical treatise on the subject. Still I could not overcome the fear of exposing my observations and conclusions to the reproach of being fanciful, without having in my hands the wherewithal to substantiate and to defend them. Besides, I had not yet reached the end of my investigations, neither had I given up hope, that in a country like India, so rich in theoretical texts on every form of art, a treatise on such an important subject might yet be found.

In the meantime I sought clarification of my problems in the study of the principles of composition that had existed in the various traditional forms of European art. In the books of modern interpreters of the Art-theories prevalent in classical Antiquity, in the Middle-ages and the Renaissance I found much useful information and stimulating thought. Above all, I gained the conviction that no great style of art, developing on natural traditional lines had ever existed, whose forms in architecture, sculpture, painting and all minor arts had not been based on strictly mathematical and geometrical principles. Nowhere, however, could I detect any system of composition identical with the specific type which had come to light in the Hindu sculptures so far examined.

As a last attempt, with the hope of perhaps discovering among living Sthapatis some still surviving knowledge about the laws of composition, I went to Orissa in 1957. I approached Paṇḍit Sadāśiva Rath Śarma of Puri, who, I had been told, was the only person who would be able to put me in touch with traditional Sthapatis and could serve me as an interpreter. In order to explain to him my query, I drew the diagram of a sculpture I had analysed on a scrap of paper. To my great surprise, Paṇḍit Sadāśiva Rath, without a moment's hesitation drew a similar diagram for another sculpture, and thus gave me a striking proof, that he perfectly knew and understood what I was looking for. When I enquired how he had discovered this manner of composition, he said he had found it described in an ancient Oriya palmleaf manuscript on architecture. On my request, he with great generosity consented to study this manuscript with me, and if necessary, to help me in translating it. The study and translation of this work took up the better half of the summer 1957 and confirmed to my great satisfaction, that what I had been searching so long was not an empty shadow.

This Orissan text, whose title is ŚILPA PRAKĀŚA, is written in Sanskrit and profusely illustrated with line-drawings. It is presumably of the 10th or 11th Cent. A.D. and deals with the construction of a Temple to the Devī. In its outlook it is entirely based on Tāntric doctrines. Between the detailed descriptions of all architectural elements of the temple, it also gives the dhyānas for the images to be carved on the walls, and together with the dhyānas, the diagrams and the exact rules for their composition. These diagrams, dealing as they do with a later type of sculpture, are not quite identical with those that had resulted from my own investigations, but they have sufficient points of affinity to show that ultimately they depend on the same basic principles. The very fact of their existence justified my assumption, that laws of composition, although not explicitely mentioned in other Śilpa Śāstras, had never been limited to the architectural elements, but had always included sculpture as well.

This documentary proof of the existence of theories and rules for the composition of sculptures at last gave me the courage to publish my own work. The Orissan text, which deals with one particular type of medieval temple only, has not been made use of, except for one technical term that simplifies the English circumscription. But it stands as a warrant and a justification for my research, and will, I hope, corroborate and amplify the present study by showing further developments and changes that took place in the schemes of composition during the transition from pre-medieval to medieval times. It will in due course be published with an English translation.

A further great encouragement I received through the interest shown in my work by Prof. P. Mus. His confidence in the fundamental validity of my findings induced him to write a Preface to this book, and thus to introduce an unknown author to Orientalists, Art-Historians and to all those interested in Hindu art. I shall ever be grateful to him for bestowing on my book the honour of his comments and for assigning it a place within the more recent studies on Indian art.

I am much obliged to the Department of Archaeology of the Government of India for supplying me the photographs needed for this book and for permission to reproduce them. I am grateful to Mr. K. K. Gupta and to Miss Yv. Boner, Dipl. Arch. for assisting me with the final drawings of the diagrams, to Miss V. Sydney and to Miss Mary Elliot for looking through my English writing, and to Dr. Priyamvada Sah, Lecturer in Mathematics of the Banaras Hindu University for advising me in matters of mathematical terminology. To Paṇḍit Ambikā Datta Upādhyāya M.A., S.Y.S., K.T. and all those others who have kindly helped me with corrections and with advise, I wish to express my thanks.

Vārāṇasī, INDIA
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ALICE BONER

INTRODUCTION

> It is only when we understand the raison d'être of iconography that we can be said to have gone back to first principles, and that is what we mean by the "Reduction of Art to Theology" (St. Bonaventura). The student understands the logic of the composition, the illiterate only its aestethic value.
>
> (A. K. Coomaraswamy in "The Christian and Oriental, or true philosophy of Art".)

Principles of composition are the immanent logic that governs any style of art, the basic law that determines its visible formulation. They are a necessity in any traditional type of art, in which systematically defined cosmic conceptions and a transcendent metaphysical vision demand an adequate and valid expression in the language of form. They are the abstract, but primary and fundamental objectivations of the spiritual image of the universe, and therefore are essential in moulding the specific and inimitable character of any traditional art.

It is in the nature of things that principles of composition can be studied only after the material features and the historical and cultural foundations of an art have been sufficiently explored, so as to allow a clear survey of its evolution, from the beginnings to the highest development and to the final decline. This means, it is a study that can be undertaken only after all other factual investigations have reached a certain maturity.

It is not surprising therefore, that in the studies on Hindu art, which have begun at a relatively recent date, the 'logic of the composition' mentioned by Coomaraswamy should not have as yet received the attention it deserves. Archaeology and History of Art have an enormous field to cover in order to do justice to the inexhaustible wealth of art produced through the millennia of India's history, and since they are primarily fact-finding disciplines, they are not directly concerned with the science and theory of art.

Modern research, on the other hand, has focussed its attention more on the symbolic aspect of Hindu art than on the problem of its form. In the light of the ancient religious Scriptures it has revealed the truly metaphysical character of its mythological imagery. E. B. Havell was the first Art-historian to disengage the study of Hindu art from merely historical or aesthetic considerations and to stress the deep symbolism and the spiritual essence of its mythological background. Heinrich Zimmer, who belonged to a later generation, proceeded further on the same path and considerably amplified in range and depth the penetration of the esoteric significance underlying Hindu mythology and its visual representation in art. Stella Kramrisch, in her monumental work "The Hindu temple" has explored with great ingenuity the metaphysical symbolism underlying the abstract forms of India's sacred architecture.

All modern efforts at unravelling the ultimate significance of Hindu imagery and form-language found their greatest inspiration and support in the pioneering work of A. K. Coomaraswamy, who went back to the oldest sources, and by a fresh analysis and interpretation of texts of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, substantiated the esoteric character of Hindu art with absolute finality. On the foundations laid by him all future studies will have to take their stand.

Although it centres around the Buddhist monuments of Indonesia, one cannot in this context pass under silence the outstanding work of Prof. P. Mus. His studies are in a class by themselves, since they have succeeded in the momentous task of coordinating the exploration of the ontological and historical background with the formal analysis and the symbolism of these monuments. In India these various aspects have mostly been treated separately by different authors, and the approach to ancient art has been in the main either from one or the other specialized point of view, without any decisive attempt at a conclusive, final coordination. Notwithstanding all the profound studies of the eminent scholars mentioned above and of many others in their particular branches, India's greatest monuments still await an all-comprehensive and exhaustive interpretation, by which the causal connection between their ideological, esoteric „raison d'être" and their formal expression could be brought to light.

The present book would not have been possible without the inspiration and guidance received from the work of these great scholars, for which they have put the writer under a deep and permanent bond of gratitude. What, however, is attempted here, is no incursion into any of the scholarly disciplines followed by them. It is an approach from a different angle, an endeavour in a new direction that has not hitherto received much attention. The distinctive character of the Indian form-language, which most authors have taken for granted as the basis, the substratum, the very point of departure for their analytical studies, is here made the main object of investigation. Attention is focussed on the form-problems themselves, as they arose in the contemplating mind of a working artist, who, moved by the grandeur of certain sculptures in the rock-cut temples of India, tried to probe into the secret of their extraordinary fascination. When in the course of her meditations and studies on the sculptures she suddenly became aware of something that looked like a coherent system of composition, it was a discovery she had neither sought nor suspected. Since she had no other equipment at her disposition besides a trained eye and a certain familiarity with the language of form, and since she was ignorant of the existence of any theory of composition in Hindu art, she felt diffident at first, when visual evidence forced the recognition of compositional patterns upon her. She considered it indispensable to prove and substantiate such evidence through the authority of ancient texts, and therefore consulted various Purāṇas and Śilpa Śāstras that deal with Iconography and Iconometry. But nowhere could she find any theory dealing with the laws of composition in plastic or pictorial art. The Śilpa Śāstras do not impart instruction on the formal aspect of figural compositions. They do not explain how all elements of an image can be brought into an organic whole, into a harmonious, rhythmic structure that would give adequate expression to their inner meaning. The elaborate canons of proportion with detailed measurements for every part of the bodies of divine figures, which they contain, are beside the point in question. These as well as the description of poses and gestures, of features and expressions, of attributes, weapons and ornaments only represent the requisites that make sacred images fit for worship. They are theological prescriptions and do not touch the subject of composition. These Śāstras also do not mention how sculptures are consistently integrated into the architectural context. The only instructions they give in this respect concern the places which the various images should occupy on the inner or outer walls of the temple. And these are determined by the space-directions, by their subject-matter and by their relationship to the main image of the shrine, following ritual, doctrinal and theological requirements.

But composition in a work of art is another matter altogether. It is that which, like the skeleton in a living organism, determines the entire structure and the relationship of all forms. It is the basic configuration of any work of art, which has to be determined at its very inception. And this of course would not be the work of theologians, but would be of the competence of the artists themselves. But since there are no records of written instructions, we are left wondering, whether this most essential act was entrusted to the imagination of the individual craftsmen, or whether they had some oral traditions and conventions to guide them. Since the Śilpa Śāstras do record laws and rules governing all elements in the construction of temples and other edifices, it appears somewhat improbable that sculpture, which was such an essential part of architecture, should have been left entirely to the discretion of every individual sculptor. Moreover, it is only in relation to the fundamental lay-out of a composition that measurements and proportions of sacred figures, on which the texts on Iconometry dwell in such detail, can have any meaning. In themselves they would be irrelevant.

Another argument is that in the absence of any guiding principle of composition it would be difficult to account for the perfect logic and harmony of design that prevails in the whole range of Indian sculpture. It would be still more difficult to account for the fact, that in different, even distant parts of the country and at different times the same subjects were moulded on very similar patterns, had not some principles of composition been valid in those times throughout the greater part of India. Why these are not mentioned in the Śilpa Śāstras is a mystery that still remains unsolved. It is possible and even probable that the veil of secrecy, by which traditional artists the world over protect the ultimate and most treasured principles of their art from profanation, forbade records in writing, and thus left the later compilers of Śilpa Śāstras, who were no craftsmen or artists, unaware of their existence.

The study of the principles of composition in Hindu sculpture is all the more necessary to-day, because to many outsiders the complicated forms and the excessive wealth of detail in Hindu architecture and sculpture still appear confusing and bewildering. Only lately a noted English writer on art said: 'Hindu art is singular in (thus) combining an extraordinary control of free plastic movement with a marked indifference to the structural mechanism. The Hindu artist's imagination is so enthralled by his feeling for the undulating and yielding movements of the body as a whole, and his feeling for the surface quality of flesh places all his emphasis on these aspects, to the exclusion of that fundamental structure

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which occupied the other great schools of plastic design'. (Roger Fry: Last Lectures). A systematic study of the inner principles governing this art will greatly help in penetrating below this picturesque surface, which apparently kept our critic enthralled to the detriment of other perceptions, and thus prevented him from having a deeper and more real understanding.

To my knowledge there has so far been only one book that has undertaken the study of the composition in Indian sculpture seriously, and that is the book by M. M. Hallade: La Composition Plastique dans les Reliefs de l'Inde, published in Paris in 1942. This study deals mainly with Buddhist relief-sculpture, from its early beginning to its full development in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. It discusses composition from an artistic and aesthetic point of view, analyzing the form-elements that predominate and determine the character of the various styles, and the ways and means by which balance and harmony is achieved. To give a few examples: The author shows how in Sāñchī composition had an elementary, fixed and stable character because vertical form-elements predominate, while the obliques, which have a dynamic character, are mostly short and of no great import. The inner balance of the compositions is found, either by the parallelism of upright figures gathered into groups, or by a strong vertical axis placed between opposite groups of moving forms, or by the framework of big masses, like those of architectures and trees, holding together the moving groups and creating a kind of rigid harmony. In Amarāvatī, on the other hand, composition is more fluid and resolved into moving rhythms, and harmony is obtained by the correspondence of smaller form-elements, mostly human figures, which, although swayed by strong, excentric movements, gravitate around a centre in the form of a tree, a pillar, a throne, a casket of relics etc. In Graeco-Buddhist art the centre acquires greater importance. The figure of the Buddha emerges often as the central axis of the composition. Even in very complex scenes, animated by strong movements, this disposition is maintained. Also in asymmetrical compositions, where the Buddha stands slightly aside, the convergence of all movements towards the centre of the panel seems to be a constant rule. When there is no plain symmetry, harmony is maintained by the equilibrium of masses and the balance of contrary movements. In the Gupta period the evolution is completed and all means are used. The narrative character of the Jātaka stories is discarded, the Buddha as central figure grows more and more into prominence and assumes rigid, hieratic attitudes, while the figures around him are often reduced to diminutive size. Forms become simplified, smooth and still. Finally the Buddha steps out of the relief-field and comes to be carved as a freestanding figure, or as a single monument of colossal dimensions on the walls and before the interior stūpas of the big cave-temples.

As will be seen from these short excerpts, the book of Miss Hallade is a general survey and an excellent study of the form-problems of relief-sculpture, as they presented themselves and as they were solved in Buddhist art during six or seven centuries of evolution.

The present work—despite the similarity of its title—has independently followed quite another line of research. It is no general survey, but the analysis of only one restricted set of relief-sculptures of the pre-medieval Hindu period. The forms of Hindu relief-sculpture are not studied with an eye to their outer formal coherence alone, but with the intent of laying bare the "structural mechanism" below the apparently inordinate wealth of their details. In other words: the present study tries to show, I) that this "structural mechanism" is based on certain geometrical laws, and 2) that the abstract patterns which are produced by the geometrical lines of the composition are in intimate correspondence with the essence and ultimate substance of the form-display, that they may therefore have, besides their structural function, an inherent symbol-value. Being based on a visual intuitive approach, this study does not pretend to establish any final THEORY of composition, nor to explain the METHODS by which the Indian Śilpins of old drew the fundamental patterns of their sculptures. But it hopes to demonstrate by a number of concrete examples the structural PRINCIPLES, which were underlying the composition of Hindu sculpture, at least at the time of its highest development.

For all practical purposes the patterns of composition may have been considerably more simple than those shown in the present book, because for a skilled and experienced Śilpin a few fundamental lines may have amply sufficed to lay out the most complex patterns.

But for the uninitiated to understand the theoretical basis and the idea behind these patterns, it is necessary to examine their static and their dynamic aspects one after the other, and then to combine them into a synthesis of the total structure. What appears certain is, that such principles of composition, if even of a more rudimentary type, remained valid as long as Hindu art remained informed by traditional conceptions, that they persisted all through the Middle-Ages and even down into the 19th Century, because their vestiges can still be traced in a number of later Miniature paintings.

Research in the present work is limited to sculptures produced during the time of the great Hindu revival, after the decline of the Buddhist faith in India. In this period these principles of composition appear in their purest, fundamental form. Our investigations did not extend to sculpture in the round, of stereometrical form, but only to relief-sculpture of two-dimensional design. Amongst these, the sculptures of the Cave-temples in Western and Southern India, created between the 6th and the 9th Century A.D. have been selected as objects of investigation. They gave the first impulse to this research.

It was before the magnificent panels carved inside the Cave-temples of Elūrā, that in 1941 I had the first intuitive perception of a deliberate compositional planning. Day after day I sat in front of these images, lost in contemplation, passively allowing their mysterious presence to work on my mind and to penetrate my inner perception. I had done this for some time, when all of a sudden one of the images—the Viṣṇu Trivikrama in Cave XV—began under my eyes to resolve its form-context into a kind of geometrical pattern. Woven in rhythms of abstract lines, this pattern emerged from the composition as though it were its subtle body containg its substance in clarified and sublimated form. I was deeply stirred by this vision. I felt that here might be the clue to the mystery that lay hidden below the surface of these prodigious and unscrutable images. I felt the urge to examine other panels for similar patterns and rhythms, and indeed, it was not long before I saw emerging here and there some kind of geometrical texture. No geometrical figures in the strict sense of the word, but rather complicated networks of straight lines in which a certain geometrical order could be sensed. They did not appear everywhere with the same evidence, nor did I understand their meaning. But the number of sculptures that revealed such patterns soon became quite impressive, and all my doubts as to their being merely accidental or the creation of my own imagination were dispelled. I gained the conviction that they had a definite purpose and represented the compositional build-up of the sculptures. But as yet they were only fleeting appearances, coming and going, over which I had no hold.

In the hope of capturing them and of comparing them with one another

I started drawing the sculptures. I expected in this way to discover some guiding principle, but instead, the patterns emerging from the drawings were of such bewildering variety, that it seemed impossible to find any workable system or to refer them to any common denominator. I felt however, that, if these patterns really represented the compositional lay-out of the sculptures, they would have to respond to one common basic principle, however different their individual applications might be.

In this perplexity I examined the yantras belonging to various deities in order to discover whether their lines had any bearing on the composition of their images. But the few yantras then available to me yielded no direct results. Apart from some casual coincidences, they did not cover the lines of the composition in their totality and could not account for their complexity. Yet they pointed in the right direction. They taught me, that in order to find the essential character of a composition it was first of all necessary to simplify the pattern to the utmost and to reduce it to its few fundamental factors. When I had done this, I recognized that all had one feature in common: that they were constituted by sets of parallel lines running across the panel and cutting each other at determined angles. In every pattern there were not more than three or four sets of lines, which showed predilection for certain planes of inclination to the exclusion of all other planes. But by what were these planes determined? To what did they correspond?

After comparing a good number of these patterns it struck me that in Vaiṣṇava sculptures the essential lines had a constant angle of inclination which was different from that of most Śaiva sculptures. I suspected a mathematical ratio, and when I measured their angle from the vertical I soon realized that these planes could not be determined by anything else than by different regular radial divisions of a circle. I realized that the organization of the panel does not take its departure from the length and breadth of its sides, but from a point at the centre, and that the square or rectangle into which the composition is set is only incidental and belongs to the architectural lay-out. The substratum of these compositions is a circular field around a central point, divided by six, eight or twelve diameters and further subdivided by a number of chords running parallel to the diameters. All forms and lines are directed by the diameters and chords of the circle and by these alone. Thus they are tied to a common point of reference, which is at the centre and the whole arrangement remains essentially concentric, just like that of yantras. Here, however, the circle encompassing the geometrical form-context is not always inscribed in the square of the panel. Sometimes it exceeds and sometimes it does not quite fill the inner space. In the case of rectangular panels it can obviously coincide only with one of its sides, either with the height or with the width. This fundamental scheme of composition is extremely simple, but has a great adaptability. It allows to draw the greatest variety of patterns, depending upon which of the diameters are emphasized and supported by parallel chords, and which are subdued or entirely suppressed.

To test the validity of these schemes I proceeded in two different and opposite ways. First I drew the compositions in their essential lines and tried to find in each one the centre, the diameter of the circle enclosing all its forms, and the number of diameters by which it had to be divided. When this was found, I drew the circle and diameters blank and then tried to fit the composition into it. In other words, I first adopted the analytical method, proceeding from the outer aspect to find the inner structure, and then the constructive method, building up an image from abstract ground-lines to the development of all its forms. Provided I had found the exact centre and the correct division of the circle, most sculptures disposed themselves with ease into these geometrical diagrams.

In parenthesis I should like to mention that the method of composition outlined above does not seem to have any relationship with any of the methods that were prevalent in architecture and other allied arts in the various cultural periods of Europe. It is not based on the mathematical ratio of musical intervals as, according to Vitruvius, was Greek architecture and as, inspired by him, it appeared again in Italian Renaissance architecture and was used by L. B. Alberti and others. It is not based on the proportions of the human body as was the Greek column, except in the sense that it was a custom in India to use the arm or hand of the chief-architect or of the patron of the building as a unit of measurement and that the structure of the Temple-Vimāna is sometimes compared to that of the human body. Again it is not dependent on any particular geometrical figure, such as the Pythagorean triangle or the hexagram. It is not based on the figure of the pentagram, whose divisions produce a continuous, illimited sequence of harmonious proportions, which as a system of composition became famous under the name of "Divine Proportion" or "The Golden Mean" and for a long time claimed universal validity, and whose chief theorician was Fra Luca Pacioli. It is not dependent on a system of interlaced squares and triangles like those determining the intricacies of late Gothic architecture, as demonstrated by W. Ueberwasser in „Spätgotische Baugeometrie, Untersuchungen an den Basler Goldschmiedrissen". Be it remarked, however, that all the above-mentioned proportions and configurations do appear eventually also in the schemes of composition of Indian sculptures, but only as the incidental outcome of the subdivisions of the circle. The circle is always the fundamental, determining factor. For none of the other methods of composition, except to a certain extent for the Gothic, is concentric space organization such a primary and exclusive consideration.

Whilst the detailed analysis of the sculptures proceeded, the question as to the real nature and significance of these diagrams presented itself as a great question-mark. Were they to be considered as simple technical devices for achieving consistent, harmonious compositions, or did they have, beyond their practical purpose, certain symbolical implications as well? Were they only meant to produce a coherent concentric form-pattern, or did they possess, in the archetypal symbolic design of the circle with radial divisions, vital references to the metaphysical sense that lay hidden within the configuration of the sculptures?

Patterns of this kind could only have been used either spontaneously and intuitively by archaic people possessed of primordial conceptions of the universe, or else consciously by highly evolved people who had preserved and penetrated intellectually the nourishing ground of their metaphysical tradition. Since all the sculptures are of a type showing considerable intellectual differentiation and unsurpassed artistic mastery, it is well-nigh impossible to imagine their compositional lay-out to be anything but conscious and deliberate. If they could under such conditions maintain their archetypal character, it must have been because their purpose was only in part practical, but was essentially the expression of a conscious symbolism. Such a possibility did not seem out of the question, since in any traditional art the practical purpose had never been the primary consideration, and therefore it was not likely that anything would come into use as a mere expedient. At any rate it had to be taken into consideration that in traditional art all expressions and figurations, whether architectural, sculptural or pictorial, were always governed by one unifying principle and that working principle depended on certain fundamental metaphysical conceptions: "Art has to do with cognition" says St. Thomas in Sum. Theol. and A. K. Coomaraswamy adds: "Religious Art is simply a visual Theology".

Visual theology, that is to say, images born from a transcending spiritual intent, will, as all theology, work on different levels of understanding and will yield fruit according to the spiritual level and nature of the beholder. The narrative mythological aspect of the effigy will appeal and deliver its message to the average mind, while the symbolical, philosophical, metaphysical content will reveal itself only to the subtly speculative or highly spiritualized individual. It is in this sense and direction perhaps that we may be justified in looking for the intrinsic, ultimate meaning of these schemes of composition.

A. K. Coomaraswamy, in "A New Approach to the Vedas", note 9, p. 78, says: 'He who regards the Myth or Icon as a statement of fact, or he who regards it as fantasy, are equally misled. Myth is to history as universal to particular, raison d'être to l'être, Icon to species as examplar to instance. Symbolism and imagery (pratīka, pratibimba, etc.) the purest form of art, is the proper language of metaphysics'. Such an approach may not be immediately comprehensible to the majority of modern people who have learnt to look upon art, not as the instrument of a spiritual message, but merely as a means for self-expression and for aesthetic, intellectual or emotional satisfaction. For the people of to-day, who are no longer guided by any of the great traditions, the symbolic meaning and esoteric background of any great art of the past is no longer self-evident. It has to be laboriously retraced by a retrospective effort, by exploring the scriptural sources and by studying the surviving faiths and practises with an open mind. But this is not sufficient. It is only by a fundamental readjustment of outlook that we may hope to come closer to the figurative form-language of ancient art, and to start penetrating its conceptions.

In order to work such a readjustment one should not only understand its subject-matter, one should be able to discard for a while conceptual, intellectual thinking in favour of a direct, concrete visual experience. One should regain a child-like intuitive openness to the expression of visual phenomena, by which alone the true message of form can be grasped.

Particularly in the case of Hindu art, understanding of the language and suggestive meaning of form is indispensable, because the Hindu artist never uses form in an arbitrary or fanciful way, but always according to its primary fundamental significance. For him every form and line and every space-direction is pregnant with an inner sense. The vertical and the horizontal, the various inclinations, the angles and curves, the parallel, converging or diverging lines, all have their special implications and functions. Round and straight, expanding or tapering forms, single and aggregate forms, all have their own individual expression and significance. In the manifold play and interaction between all of these in the infinite variety of compositional patterns, the abstract form-elements always maintain their intrinsic, fundamental character.

In its metaphysical essence, form constitutes a definite mode of cosmic operation. It arises from certain movements of the Life-force that animates all matter, and by a process of expansion and growth, or of condensation and contraction, causes it to crystallize into certain shapes. These, as its outer limiting circumscription, show the nature of its formation. Different movements, obeying different urges and impulses of the cosmic Life-force create different forms. Thus lines, forms and colours are not accidental, but are direct manifestations of these inner forces, and therefore present a perfect analogy to spiritual reality, their ultimate Cause. This vast composition of form, line and colour, in whose ever-changing array, ever-varying relations, ever-moving dance the Life of the universe displays itself, has a direct appeal, through the channel of vision, to man's emotional, imaginative and creative faculties. Form, as the precipitation of the universal creative impulse and its visible image, is man's most essential and vital experience, because it brings him into direct, intimate contact with these creative forces and nourishes his subconscious as well as his conscious mind with the images and impressions of the surrounding world.

As a human mode of expression, form is a reflection of the cosmic world of forms: This should however not be understood as meaning a mechanical recording of whatever object strikes the eye. It is a discriminative operation capable of detecting within any given form the active principle that brought it forth. For instance: as in nature a movement drawing from all sides towards a centre finally creates a sphere or a circle, the image of a sphere or a circle directly suggests the idea of concentration, cohesion, compactness and unity. On the other hand, a movement radiating from a common centre, such as the rays of the sun, the petals of a flower, the wave-circles on the surface of water immediately suggests the idea of growth and expansion. A straight line, the shortest way from one point to another, suggests the idea of directness, speed, energy and determination, while a sinuous line suggests the idea of pliability, softness or weakness and indecision. Forms and lines have function, character and expression in themselves, quite independently from what they actually represent in an image. On our subconscious form-sensitivity they act primarily as such, as pure form-expressions, and only secondarily by their objective connotations. It is on this identification of function and form that visual form-symbolism is based, and this is more directly potent than what I should like to call mental symbolism, arising from literary or ideological associations [1].

Patterns and figurations that express this primary visual form-symbolism are not intellectual constructions, but concretions or precipitations of cognitive or emotional experiences and processes. It is this imponderable quality of form that constitutes the essence of sacred imagery and most intimately expresses its content. It is also the reason why in sacred imagery representation of natural phenomena can never be used otherwise than by way of analogy, as vehicle and garb of an inner significance.

The symbolism of form-language is not intrinsically different from verbal symbolism, except that it works through a different medium. But while the symbolism of word-images is readily understood and accepted as such, the symbol-value of plastic and pictorial images is often missed. It is perhaps the grosser, visible and tangible nature of the medium, apparently further removed than the word from spiritual conceptions, that creates the misunderstanding. Visual beauty, by carrying away the senses, is apt to make man forget all that it stands for, and this is possible because the modern artificial, intellectualistic attitude has lost the sense for the sacredness and spiritual potency of form. Yet Word and Form, both come from the same source. They are both emanations of the supreme Life-force and both stand as symbols for transcendent Reality. But since they are two different channels through which the Spirit works they act upon different faculties in man. This is the reason why there can never be absolute equation between the expressions of the one and of the other. It is necessary to clearly distinguish their respective ways of operation, which are incommensurable, and to understand that what eludes the one makes the essential and unalienable character of the other. A concept expressed in words and sounds cannot be tranferred into signs and figures without taking on entirely new connotations. Auditive expression works in time, while visual expression works in space. The former is intelligible only in a sequence, the latter only as a concerted and simultaneous whole. The former can never be instantaneous, the latter must be so.

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[1] See the article: 'The symbolic aspect of form' by the writer, in the Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Vol. XVII, 1949.

The sense of sight, which is of the nature of light, of the swiftest element, takes in the totality of an image all in one. Visual images, unlike auditive images, are not produced in successive stages and pieced together by the associative memory, but are presented to the mind in a single flash. By abolishing the time-factor, they suppress change and mutation and this helps in bringing out the timeless essence of things. In India the highest realization of Divine Truth is called Īkṣaṇa or Darśana, from the roots īkṣ and dṛś—which both mean to see—and he who has attained supreme Consciousness is called a Ṛṣi, a Seer. To "see" Truth means to assimilate it in its entirety. The primary importance of the visual faculty in deciphering, assimilating and expressing the facts of existence and their action on the human soul, is stressed by J. J. Bachofen in the following words: "At the very beginning man expressed his deeper thoughts by signs, and these signs Earth offered to him in her animals and plants, as well as in the geometrical forms of many of her inanimate products. Each one of these meant for him the revelation of one particular idea, as whose sign and expression he now adopted it. Under his hands they became mute symbols or pictorial parables....." [1]

If in later times sacred imagery is apparently inspired by the Word, that is to say by hymns, legends and songs, its effectiveness for that does not depend on the word, but on its own specific medium and mode of expression. It is never a simple translation or illustration, but an entirely new cast. NĀMA is here transformed into RŪPA, which is governed by another set of cosmic laws. The Dhyānas (meditations) on divinities, which guide the Indian artist in his work, merely describe the postures, gestures, expressions and attributes of the image and nothing more. It is left to the artist to endow the image with life and with such forms as would cogently and truthfully reflect its essential meaning. "The imager, on the night before beginning his work and after ceremonial purification, is instructed to pray: 'Oh, Thou Lord of all the Gods, teach me in dreams how to carry out the work I have in mind". (Agni-Purāṇa). The imager who utters such a prayer is not ignorant, but already intimately conversant with his subject and all its implications. His prayer is a plea for that ultimate formulation of the visionary apperarance, in which measure and proportion, form and line, movement and space-direction will, by their synthesis and harmony, ignite the spark of life. These qualities, which are the essence of plastic and pictorial formulation, he cannot find in the Dhyānas or verbal descriptions. In the language of form itself he has to discover all elements that transform abstract conceptions into images. And such images that synchronize and give a synthetic presentation of all essential features are often more forceful and eloquent than words.

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[1] „Seine tieferen Gedanken hat der Mensch zu allererst durch Zeichen ausgesprochen, und diese Zeichen bot ihm die Erde in ihren Tieren und Gewächsen sowie in den geometrischen Formen mancher ihrer leblosen Produkte. Jedes dieser Dinge galt ihm als Offenbarung einer besonderen Idee, als deren Zeichen und Ausdruck er sie nun wählte. Sie wurden unter seiner Hand stumme Gleichnisse oder gezeichnete Parabeln..." (J. J. Bachofen, Das Natursymbol als Keimzelle des Mythus).

This language of form was understood in its fundamental sense by people of earlier ages, who lived in direct, daily contact with the powers of nature and therefore were still intensely alive to the message of visual appearances. Their receptivity, not dulled by book-learning, was intact, and equally intact was their power of visual expression by gesture, mimic, dance, or by signs and forms.

It was only with the growing complication and materialization of life that the primordial significance of form became lost and therefore required more and more the support of objective images to express its meaning, until in our days an education with exclusive emphasis on rational, conceptual and discursive thinking has weakened, when it has not completely atrophied the faculty of form-emotion and of form-comprehension. It is not the analytical observation and registration of facts, but the intuitive apprehension of the total appearance, of the significant physiognomy of any existing form that can elevate it to the dignity of a symbol. Only when in the phenomenal world we recognize images and reflections of our inner being, appearances become significant and can be understood as expressions or equivalents of thoughts. Children as a rule still retain this faculty of form-intuition, even in very "advanced" civilizations, and this is the reason why most children are normally and potentially artists.

The insufficiency that has impaired man's form-sensivity, has also impaired his power of significant, symbolic form-creation. If the symbolism inherent in the forms of nature cannot be captured by a rational, scientific study, it can neither be made to serve artistic expression by a mere act of will. It can only be found in the inner vision of the man who lives in unison, and is completely identified with cosmic law and operation. Man's mind is not the inventor, but the transmittor of the symbolism inherent in natural forms: "True symbolism, far from being artificially invented by man, is inherent in nature itself, or rather (that) the whole of nature is nothing but a symbol of transcendent realities". (René Guénon). [1]

In India the Tāntric doctrines have gone deep into the transcendent significance of line and form. The Yantras used as supports for meditation and contemplation are abstract geometrical figurations. They contain a form-symbolism which is beyond even visual appearances, and represents the primary spiritual essence of things. They are like direct reflections of cosmic forces divested of material contingencies: "The dynamic graph or the diagram of forces by which anything can be represented—the picture of the constituent forces—is called the Yantra of that thing" [2].

The sculptural compositions that are studied in this book, are equally based on a "dynamic graph" or a "diagram of forces", which is incorporated in the movement of the figures. By merging their shapes into the lines of stress, the figures become the "graph" of the forces that are in operation. Śukrācārya perhaps had in mind this process of transfiguration of visible form into a diagram of forces, when he made the following cryptic statement: "The lineaments of images are determined by the relation which subsists between the adorer and the adored" [3]. This relation, if it has to fulfil its object of creating a figure of analogical likeness, cannot remain on the merely affective, emotional plane, it has to take place on the cognitive, spiritual plane. The inception and realization of such a work of art is described in Foucher's Iconographie Bouddhique, quoted and condensed by Coomaraswamy: [4] 'The artist (sādhaka, mantrin or yogin, as he is variously and significantly called) after ceremonial purification is to proceed to a solitary place. There he is to perform the "Sevenfold

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[1] „Le véritable symbolisme, loin d'être inventé artificiellement par l'homme, se trouve dans la nature même, ou pour mieux dire, (que) la nature toute entière n'est qu'un symbole des réalités transcendentes".
René Guénon: Le symbolisme de la Croix, p. 38.

[2] Sir John Woodroffe, Mahāmāyā, p. 184.

[3] Quoted by Coomaraswamy in 'The Hindu View of Art': Historical, note 12, p. 191.

[4] 'The Hindu View of Art': Theoretical, p. 44.

Office", beginning with the invocation of the hosts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the offering to them of real or imaginary flowers. Then he must realize in thought the four (infinite) modes of friendliness, compassion, sympathy and impartiality. Then he must meditate upon the emptiness (śūnyatā) or non-existence of all things, for, "by the fire of the idea of the abyss, it is said, there are destroyed beyond recovery the five factors" of ego-consciousness. Then only should he invoke the desired divinity by the utterance of the appropriate seed-word (bīja) and should identify himself completely with the divinity to be represented. Then finally, on pronouncing the Dhyāna-mantram, in which the attributes are defined, the divinity appears visibly, "like a reflection" or "as in a dream", and this brilliant image is the artist's model'.

It is in the inner vision that the image is born, and it is entirely from the inner law that its form depends. The artist has to empty himself of all futile impressions of the outer world, he has to purify himself of all affective ties, he has to burn up all factors of ego-consciousness in the fire of meditation. Then only can he begin to invoke the appearance of the divinity he wants to represent. With the repetition of the bīja (seed)-mantra he becomes identified with that divinity, and then only will the dhyāna-mantra, in which all the attributes are defined, become effective. These dhyāna-mantras, when read without the preparation described by Foucher, appear as arid lists of features and attributes of the divinities concerned, but when pronounced in a state of inner participation, they spring to life as visible images, as reflections of transcendent reality, with the evidence of dream-visions.

If this inner vision borrows the lineaments of the visible world, it is because this is the only language in which it can make itself understood. The forms of the outer world are not an end in themselves. They are only a means to an end. In the inner vision they undergo a mysterious process of transfiguration, by which they discard their phenomenal reality and become charged with transcendent significance.

The primary purpose of sacred images is not to give aesthetic enjoyment, but to serve as focussing points for the spirit. Born in meditation and inner visualization, they should—and that is their ultimate intent—lead back to meditation and to the comprehension of that transcendent Reality from which they were born. As reflections of divine Essence they are as doors between the finite and the infinite, through which the devotee may pass from one into the other. If they are beautiful, it is because they are true. Beauty is the other face of Truth, it is not a matter of taste. Beauty comes unasked, since the divine Spirit will always become manifest in that which is in tune with cosmic Harmony.

"Beauty is the attractive power of a perfect expression".

(A.K. Coomaraswamy in "The Christian and Oriental, or true, philosophy of Art.)

II

> Crafts such as building and carpentry take their principles from that realm and from the thinking there! (Plotinus, Enneads, V. 9. II, quoted by A. K. Coomaraswamy in: Christian and Oriental, or true, philosophy of Art.)

We have now to say a few words about the nature, character and implications of the geometrical diagrams on which we presume the outlay of these sculptures to have been based. For this purpose we have to begin with a few general reflections on the nature of space and space-organisation.

A given space or surface may be divided and subdivided indefinitely by straight lines without ever becoming an organic whole. But as soon as a point is placed in the centre of a given space or surface, the amorphous extension becomes transformed into an organized structure. The centre is a point of reference towards which all parts converge, and therefore the whole structure becomes "con-centrated". The existence of the centre creates a hierarchy of values, in which the parts cease to be equivalent and assume different weight and importance. The importance of any part diminishes in direct proportion to its distance from the centre. Between the centre and the outer parts, between the interior and the exterior, the single and the plural, the undimensional and the ubiquitous there is a polarity that creates tension as well as organic coalescence. The centre is the source and fountain-head of this organic whole, and the position of all outer parts is determined with reference to the centre.

What is true of a geometrical construction in the limited dimensions of a drawing-board, has its validity also in the unlimited dimensions of the universe. The creation of space is inconceivable without the duality and polarity of an undimensional point and an indefinite extension. In "Le mystère de la Croix", an anonymous work of the 18th Century, the author says that the All is engendred from the central indivisible Point in the double triangle (Ṣaṭkoṇa yantra), regarded as the symbol of Creation. This "Point" is one of the world's universal symbols, whether set in the centre of a hexagram or in a circular maṇḍala or yantra, or within a sphere [1].

In Indian metaphysics all theories of the creative evolution of the universe postulate the primary existence of a centre from which all Manifestation emanates. Especially in Tāntric doctrines the Bindu (point, drop) is a fundamental notion. It signifies that point of concentration and condensation of all divine creative forces, from where the manifestation of the universe takes its beginning. The Bindu in this aspect of creative concentration is called the Ghanībhūta Bindu, that means the bindu pregnant with all elements that will constitute the totality of Manifestation. In this Point the creative will of the Supreme is latent and potential, but ready to break forth, to divide and multiply itself into the infinite expansion of the Universe.

We are here however not concerned with the ontological development of the categories of existence, but only with the formal aspects of this development, concerning space and time.

The centre is undimensional and indivisible, it is nowhere and everywhere and from it emanate the three fundamental dimensions or six directions of space. In the transition from point to space, from the non-dimensional to dimension the order of volume and form is created. Indefinite, ubiquitous extension is the fullest and most complete of all forms, it embraces all dimensions at an indefinite equal distance from the undimensional centre. Its image is the sphere: „Sphoera cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nillibi" [2].

By virtue of its ubiquity the sphere is the symbol of the universe, and by virtue of its completeness and perfection it is also the prototype of all organized form. Plato's Androgyny, the human prototype, in whom both male and female elements are united into one perfect, indivisible whole, was therefore described as a sphere [3]. Nothing can be added or taken away from a sphere without destroying its intrinsic character. All organized forms are mutations and transformations derived from this original perfect form.

[1] Sir John Woodroffe: Varṇamālā or Garland of Letters, Chapter XIII.

[2] In the Sāṁkhya doctrine the universe is called the Brahmāṇḍa, the (golden) egg of Brahmā.

[3] See René Guénon: Le symbolisme de la Croix, p. 58

With the creation of Space, which involves the first stirring of movement in the Unmanifest, proceeds the creation of Time. There is no movement without time, and therefore no space without time, and conversely there is no time without movement or space. They are the three aspects of the one process that operates the unfolding of all manifestation, subtle and gross, while the immanent, immovable centre, beyond space and time, remains complete and perfect in the full potentiality of its Being.

The three dimensions of space emanating from the centre are not equivalent. One, the vertical dimension dominates over the two others and holds them together. It represents the primary extension of the Bindu and is central with respect to the two other dimensions that lie horizontally across it. As the central, immovable axis of the universe, it joins the two opposite poles, the Zenith and the Nadir, and is therefore called the polar axis. The two horizontal dimensions or axes that lie across, form a rightangled cross, whose arms run forward and backward, right and left, or North-South and East-West. These two axes are called the solsticial and the equinoctial axis respectively, they stand in opposition to and are dependent on the central, polar axis.

In India, the theory of the Guṇas, which considers the universe as being constituted of three fundamental tendencies or qualities, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, is intimately connected with the symbolism of space-directions. Sattva is the ascending tendency towards Consciousness, Light and Truth, Rajas is the expanding, dynamic tendency of Power, and Tamas is the descending tendency, weighed down by Inertia, Darkness and Ignorance. They are represented with the diagram of a cross. The vertical bar embodies in its upper part the ascending sāttvic tendency, while in its lower part it embodies the opposite, the descending tāmasic tendency. The cross-bar embodies on both sides the expanding rājasic tendency. The centre is a point of indifferentiation, from which all Guṇas originate.

To the space-directions and the Guṇas correspond also the five elements, in accordance with their intrinsic qualites. Fire (anal) belongs to the ascending Sattva-guṇa, Earth (pṛthivī) and Water (ap) correspond to the descending, inert Tamoguṇa, Air (vāyu) belongs to the expanding Rajoguṇa, while Ether (ākāśa) lies at the indifferentiated centre. Ether is the source and origin of all other elements and is all-pervading and omnipresent. It corresponds on the plane of manifestation to Cidākāśa or the Bindu on the spiritual plane. These fundamental conceptions determine much of what will be found in the compositional diagrams of the sculptures[1].

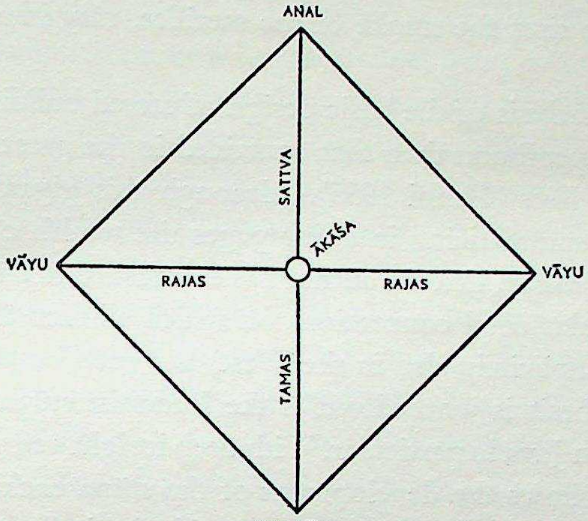

Fig. 1

A sphere with three rectangular diameters directed towards the six cardinal points has from the dawn of human history been understood to represent the plan on which the Great Architect of the Universe has built this Cosmos. All traditional cultures have based their architecture on this fundamental plan, in accordance with the immanent significance of space-directions. When building a dwelling place or a sanctuary the basic idea was always and everywhere to recreate symbolically the shape of the universe. It was intended to adequately circumscribe a consecrated piece of ground, on which to maintain, during the sojourn on earth, a living contact with the transcendent Principle. Therefore the central nucleus from where emanate all developments in space and the vertical axis had to be emphasized, or its presence had to be signified by a central opening in the roof. The basic symbolism which is implied in this outlay remains the same always, although it may take different shapes in different cultures and with different people. The central nucleus is the heart of the building, its foundation and "raison d'être". The central vertical or polar axis establishes the connection between the holy of holies on the physical plane with the supreme Principle on the metaphysical plane. The pointed, triangular roof, the vault, the stūpa, the dome, the spire, all embody this aspiration towards the Principle. Sometimes even the hearth or the chimney of a house, or the central atrium, where the house-altar is placed, and from where rises the smoke of the sacrifice, may imply such a symbolism.

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[1] For an exhaustive analysis of the symbolism of the Guṇas, the Space directions and the elements see René Guénon; „Le symbolisme de la Croix". Ch. IV and V.

There is no analysis of the basic design of sacred buildings more comprehensive and profound than that contained in the great book on Barabuḍur by Paul Mus (Hanoi 1935). Although this gigantic work defies any attempt at summarizing in a few pages the wealth of its thought, I would only like to say, that the author has established in an unimpeachable manner the fundamental conceptions on which all sacred architecture in the East (and implicitely also in the West) has been based. The example on which the thesis is worked out is the Buddhist stūpa in general and the Barabuḍur in Java in particular. With deep insight and with compelling logic P. Mus follows the development of the stūpa back to its remotest origins, and discovers that its prototype, ideologically and formally, is not the tumulus, as several scholars proposed before him, but the Vedic fire-altar. With the creation of the fire-altar the integration of man into the cosmic order has, perhaps for the first time, found a clear and explicit expression in a concentric, plastic figuration.

The universe, in the Vedic conception, originated from the great Puruṣa, the primordial Being that was before anything existed. The Puruṣa was dismembered, or, in order to be many, dismembered himself, and out of the parts of his body the universe with its multitudinous forms and individual selves came to be. The bricks of the altar represent the material elements of the Puruṣa. Being set according to the cardinal points, they stand for the extension of the universe in all directions of space, the vault of the sky being its roof. Besides, being in a determined number, 1000 and its multiples, they represent the great Year, recurrent Time and the ever renewed round of birth and death. Thus the structure of the altar embodies the physical aspect of the universe in space and time, while the tongue of flame at its centre, the god Agni, is the heart of the altar. Through the vertical ascent of the flame, man, the small puruṣa, identifies himself with the great Puruṣa, the father of the universe. In the fire-altar the ancient Brāhmaṇas enacted again and again the sacrificial dismemberment of the primordial Being, and the sacrificial re-integration of the individual selves into the cosmic totality.

How this conception was transferred into Buddhist ideology, which forbade metaphysical speculation and discarded rituals, and how it was transformed into the Buddhist system of psychological, moral values is one of the main themes of P. Mus's work. This, however, is outside the scope of our study, and it will be sufficient to say, that this reciprocal process of disintegration and re-integration with its new psychological connotation is what is represented by the innumerable stūpas that everywhere mark the path of Buddhism. The stūpa also is an image of the cosmos. The square or round upright base corresponds to the altar and represents the earthplane, the round dome corresponds to the vault of heaven, and the sacred relic at the centre of the stūpa is the equivalent of Agni, the fire element. As Agni is the life of the altar, the relic is the life of the stūpa. The relic commemorates the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha, which is not death, but new life on a spiritual plane. The vertical aspiration is here marked by the pole with a pyramid of umbrellas that project from the top of the stūpa and, prolonged down to its base, figures the central governing axis of the whole structure.

In the stupendous monument of Barabuḍur, the primary conception of the stūpa has been developed into a figuration of such complexity, with hundreds of Buddha images and miles of sculptured panels of the most exquisite beauty, that the question has been raised whether it was a stūpa at all. Paul Mus has demonstrated in a masterly way, that the luxuriant overgrowth of architectural and sculptural work only concealed the core of a strictly geometrical structure, laid out according to the accepted stūpa symbolism. The lower part of the monument is a stepped pyramid, and the upper part a flattened round dome crowned by a bell-shaped smaller stūpa with a central pinnacle. The overgrowth of sculpture is an elaborate poetic illustration of the Buddhist path of liberation, and each range of panels is in logical correspondence with the symbolism of the structural element that lies below it and is covered by it.

The spiritual ascent of the soul, which in the Vedic altar was entrusted to the god Agni in the jet of the flame, is, in the relief-sculptures on the walls of the Barabuḍur depicted as a gradual progress from the entanglement in the nether world of forms to final liberation. The lowest round of reliefs, illustrating the world that must be left behind in order to begin this ascent, is below the base of the monument, blocked up behind a wall. Steep flights of steps lead to the upper square terraces, where scenes of the Buddha's previous existences are carved on the walls all around, as examples of compassion, detachment and self-sacrifice, the stages leading towards liberation. These scenes are punctuated by figures of the Buddha seated in niches in attitudes signifying the three stages on the path of his emancipation: taking the Earth to witness (bhūmi-sparśa), attaining Illumination (sambodhi), and preaching the Law (dharma-cakra-pravartana). The three flat, concentric, round terraces above contain nothing but meditating Buddhas under perforated bell-shaped stūpas. Here the world of forms has been definitely left behind, and the soul abides alone in the reality of pure spiritual bliss. Crowning the top-centre of the entire structure, hidden away behind a stūpa of solid masonry, is the Ādi-Buddha, the Unknown, the supreme Principle, corresponding to the Puruṣa who was placed as a golden disc in the base of the fire-altar and was lit up in its flame. Here the Ādi-Buddha marks the central axis of the monument, just as in the cosmic order he is the Meru, the central pillar and support of the universe.

The Hindu temple with which we are here mainly concerned, is descended in a parallel line from the Vedic altar. It is also a symbol and magic embodiment of the universe, where the centre stands for the Principle and the development in width and height for the stages and hierarchies of manifestation. It is equally disposed around an ideal central axis, conceived as the Meru, or pillar of the universe. But here the central nucleus, the point which contains the potency of the supreme Principle, is not concealed in a block of masonry, but is accessible in the hollow of the innermost shrine. This, the abode of the symbol or the image of the deity, is called the garbha-gṛha, the container of the seed (of universal manifestation). From here the building spreads out horizontally and vertically. The crosswise horizontal expansion stands for the existential developments in space and time, while the vertical extension stands for the ascending spiritual orders and hierarchies of the universe. The śikhara of the temple is built around the polar axis and represents the aspiration and ascent from the plane of earthly existence to the spiritual plane of pure and deathless consciousness. Perpendicularly above the garbha-gṛha it carries on its pinnacle the amṛta-kalasa, the vessel of deathlessness, just as the stūpa carries the staff with the umbrellas, the symbol of spiritual victory.

The concentric organisation for all manner of sacred symbolic representations seems to be an inescapable necessity, for only in the polar complementarism of centre and circumference is it possible to find a true and adequate material figuration of the complementarism between principle and manifestation.

State Museum Library Lucknow

The yantras and maṇḍalas, which are abstract geometrical symbols of the same metaphysical conceptions, are based on similar concentric figurations, but, because they are mostly two-dimensional, they contain all three dimensions compressed into one flat or slightly rounded surface. The yantras are composed of intersecting geometrical figures, which enclose a central bindu. The bindu, as everywhere, here also symbolizes the immanent Principle of Being, and at the same time it is the polar axis, as seen from above. The geometrical figures around the bindu are the emanations of the divine essence, not on the terrestrial, but on the spiritual plane. Being two-dimensional, they figure on the horizontal plane what in three-dimensional constructions, like temples, is embodied in the vertical elevation. The way of spiritual ascent from lower to higher states of being proceeds here from the circumference in the direction of the centre, the highest states being those closest to the centre. Reaching the centre means identification with the Supreme, the God in one's own heart. The geometrical figures are enclosed within concentric circles surrounded by two corollas of lotus-petals which represent the outer world of manifestation. Finally the whole is encased in a square with gateways in the four directions of space. This is called the bhū-pura and represents the earth (bhū) and ground of existence. It gives a protective enclosure to the divine presence within the yantra.

The analysis of the sculptured panels in the ancient Cave-temples has revealed geometrical diagrams of analogous concentric construction. They have, however, their specific features, different from those of devotional yantras, which make them suitable for figural compositions. The difference consists in this that the circular area, instead of being filled by intersecting geometrical figures, is divided into regular sectors by an even number of diameters and further subdivided by chords running parallel to the diameters, connecting their points of intersection with the circle. All forms within the ambit of the circle are placed in correspondence with some of the diameters or with their parallels, and thus they participate, either directly or indirectly, in the concentric lay-out of the diagram. In this way all parts of a composition are connected with the central point, no matter whether they touch it or not.

The space-directions embodied in the diameters and their parallels are the vital nerve-lines of these compositions. They create currents of energy that run either parallel or cross each other in their trajectory, that act and react upon one another in various ways according to their position in space, that is to say, their position in the relief-field. These life-currents transform a composition into a functional organism. The forms animated by them become functional stresses, and an image conceived on such a pattern will never be a static configuration, even if the single figures represented are at rest. The currents of energy circulating within them will ever be at work and animate their forms.

The centre alone is static, and although invisible, it is that element with reference to which the direction, intent and character of all movements and forms become visible. The central point is the hidden, invisible revealer, and the controller of all active powers at work. However disruptive movements and stresses may be, they never fall apart in these compositions, because they are all connected in one way or another with the common centre, which maintains their inner cohesion and coherence.

All compositions are primarily divided by the two fundamental space-directions, the vertical and the horizontal. Along the vertical the space is divided into right and left, and along the horizontal it is divided into a lower and an upper half. The two halves are always the reverse reflection of one another, but while between right and left there is only a difference in quality, there is between the lower and the upper half a difference of degree. In the horizontal extension the right side represents the Male, Śiva, Sūrya, Agni, Piṅgalā Nāḍī, etc., the left the Female, Śakti, Candra, Soma, Īḍā Nāḍī etc. These categories, although not equal, are equivalent and complementary. But in the vertical extension there is an irreversible order of values, the lower being always inferior in kind to the upper. The lowest region represents bhū, the physical plane of existence, the middle region represents bhuvar, the mental plane of sensation and perception, and the

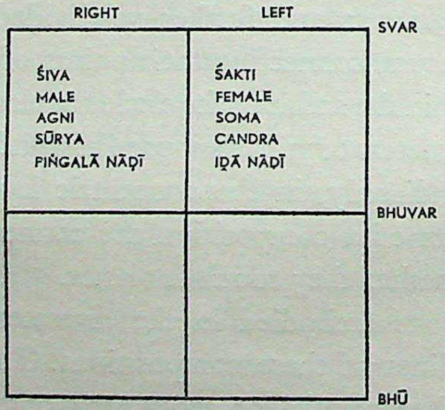

Fig. 2

uppermost svar, the spiritual plane of pure consciousness. This ultimately depends on the metaphysical symbolism of the vertical and the horizontal planes, referred to previously.

The different planes of inclination of the diameters determine the position and orientation of all form-elements within the composition. Each direction has its own specific character and function.

Verticals and horizontals are firm and static and embody all balancing and stabilizing elements. When standing in the centre, the vertical is the axis, the support of the whole composition. Wherever it may stand, the vertical always gives a sense of equilibrium, stability and firmness. It may in some cases also express an upward aspiration, but even then it would retain a centralizing and stabilizing quality. The vertical is essentially timeless and holds apart that which is above from that which is below, the sāttvic and divine from the tāmasic and earthbound. The absence of verticals in a composition implies the absence of stability and balance, which leaves full sway to kinetic stresses.

The horizontal is ambivalent, depending on whether it is active or passive. It may have an expanding, outgoing tendency, but it may also embody the quiescence of an established order. It may show the levels and degrees of existence, separating the higher from the lower, and thus also have a stabilizing and arresting function. The absence of horizontals may, accordingly, either mean an absence of expansive movement or, an absence of levels and of rest, and thus leave its full scope to vertical aspiration or to dynamic movement. When both verticals and horizontals, the two stabilizing factors are absent and oblique lines dominate the composition, an extreme dynamism will be the result.

The diagonal and all other oblique diameters are essentially kinetic and are therefore responsible for movement and stress. They also embody the time-factor in a composition. [1] The degree of their inclination depends on the number of diameters by which the circle is divided. Since in these compositions the diameters are either six, eight or twelve, it is possible that these numbers have in themselves symbolic significance. All Vaiṣṇava images analysed so far have been found composed on octapartite diagrams, while most Śaiva images have been found composed on hexapartite or dodecapartite diagrams. Four and six are the numbers relating to Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively, and eight and twelve are only their multiples.

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[1] Prof. P. Mus pointed out the greek etymology of the word diagonal: agon means competitive struggle, thus di-agon-al would mean: through competitive struggle.

But since a few Śiva images (not included in this book) also appear to be composed on octapartite diagrams, it remains doubtful whether these numbers are really used in their symbolic sense.

What however is quite obvious is that different inclinations of the diameters indicate differences in the dynamic stress. The more an oblique line approaches the horizontal, the more forceful and violent is its movement, and the more it approaches the vertical, the more restrained and composed its movement will become. This is not strange in view of the fact that the horizontal has mostly an expanding quality, while the vertical is eminently static and firm.

Different horizontal levels are often used in these compositions to indicate the three worlds and the different levels of existence and of consciousness. They are characterized by the smaller figures which surround the main deity. The lowest is the earth-level (bhū), the existential physical plane of life, occupied by Nāgas, Guhyakas, Yakṣas, demons and animals, which stand, sit or lie on the ground. The middle space is the atmosphere (bhuvar or antarikṣa), the region of psychic life, of perception, feeling and thought, the plane of exalted human life, occupied by Ṛṣis and Yogins. The uppermost region is heaven (svar), the region of pure spirit, in which heavenly beings such as Devas, Siddhas, Dikpālas, Gandharvas and Vidyādharas are floating. The great divine figures that are the subject-matter of the compositions cover all three regions, since they are not bound to any of them, and display their action across the entire field, the universe. Their feet reach down into the earth-plane but generally do not touch the ground. They are raised either upon a lotus-pedestal, or a lion-throne, or a sheet of water, or on their vehicle (vāhana) or on two of these supports combined.

The importance and significance of the central point (bindu) of the composition is in many cases demonstrated also by the fact that it is identified with one or the other of the five elemental cakras (centres of energy) of the deity represented. It is identified either with the Maṇipūra cakra, the creative Fire-centre at the navel, or with the Anāhata or Prāṇa-cakra in the chest, the centre of breath and vital energy, or with the Viśuddha-cakra at the base of the throat, the centre of speech and discriminative knowledge, occasionally also with the Svādhiṣṭhāna cakra. When divine figures are represented in highly dynamic and destructive aspects, it may happen that the centre is at the point of disruption, from where the limbs are thrown out in different directions of space. This is usually at the root of the thigh or the groin and is probably meant to indicate the place of the Mūlādhāra cakra, the Earth-centre at the base of the vertebral column. In such cases the central bindu has a symbolic function quite apart from its compositional importance, because its position on one or the other cakra determines the particular character of the deity. This will be fully explained in the analyses of the single figures.

Since the concentric figurations, as exemplified by the groundplans of temples, by yantras and maṇḍalas, are of cosmic order, and since the diagrams underlying the sculptures are also concentrically organized, the possibility of their too representing cosmic symbols cannot at priori be discounted. One may even venture the hypothesis that, if yantras of abstract lines correspond in the language of signs to the bīja-mantras, the mantras of seed-syllables in the language of sounds, these diagrams of figurative compositions may correspond to those mantras in which the divinity is invoked in fully articulated words set in verses. If they can be considered as cosmic symbols, the central bindu, the hub of the composition would here also take the place of the Brahman or Ātman, the surrounding circle would embrace the totality of Manifestation, and the space within the circle would be the field (kṣetra), the universe with cosmic and human existence, in which the operations of divine powers take place. The subtle states of being would be near the centre, while the grosser states would be towards the circumference. The space-directions would impart their specific character and function to movements on all planes of existence. Such movements may run across the entire field, when determined by entire diameters or their parallels. They may be centrifugal or centripetal, when determined by the radii. When flowing outwards they would indicate expanding stresses, either creative or destructive, when ebbing inwards, collecting, integrating tendencies, and thus refer to processes of evolution or involution, of manifestation or dissolution. Movements running around the circumference of the circle would refer to the rotation of the world-wheel, the saṁsāra-cakra, sustained but unredeemed.

Since in all traditional conceptions of the universe, there is perfect correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the cosmic whole and the cycle of human existence, the movements in these diagrams may refer to eternal processes in one order as well as in the other. Viewed in the light of man's adventure, the central point would stand for the Ātman, and the circle would encompass the entire development of his existence and his spiritual life. Movements tending away from the centre would represent the entanglement in the world of Māyā, the way of egotistic worldly life, the pravṛtti mārga, while movements tending from the periphery towards the centre would represent the way of return to the source of Being, the nivṛtti mārga, the release from the wheel of saṁsāra, reintegration, liberation or mokṣa.

The analysis of the single sculptures will show, how far their space-directions, their lines and forms may, quite apart from their objective content, embody the sense and significance outlined above and justify the claim of their inherent symbolism.

In any case, the elements of these diagrams are not arbitrary inventions, but correspond, as explained before, to certain irreversible cosmic principles. The fundamental character of space-directions can never be altered and their functions cannot be interchanged. The vertical, the horizontal and the oblique have all their natural, specific and intrinsic meaning, which the human mind realizes intuitively. The same can be said of the straight line and the curve and of all fundamental geometrical forms, which have their particular unmistakable character, obeying cosmic laws. When brought into mutual relationship in the way they are in any work of art, be it architecture, sculpture or painting, they act upon one another, they condition and qualify, they complete or oppose and contend with one another, but they never lose their own intrinsic character. The patterns resulting from these varied interrelations create visual reactions, psychological and spiritual associations in the beholder. Their meaning is grasped intuitively, without effort, because human personality is of one order with the forces of the universe and responds spontaneously, from the depth, to these elemental aspects.

All concentric figurations have a direct impact on inner receptiveness. With their elements firmly collected around a centre, they lead the mind from the periphery back to this centre, and by analogy, from outer aspects to the inner essence of things. It is for this reason that yantras and maṇḍalas are such effective helps to meditation. The same is true of these sculptures, which can be considered as yantras, whose abstract lines are developed and enlarged into figural compositions, and whose forms are enlivened by more tangible emotional associations.

It must be borne in mind, that these figural compositions do not refer to legendary or historical events that took place in space and time. The figures and exploits of the great gods depicted in them refer to timeless mysteries, to spiritual events, to the descent of divine forces into the cosmos. Their composition on a foundation of cosmic and spiritual symbolism helps to maintain the spiritual perspective, and prevents their transcendent reality, in spite of its anthropomorphic garb, from shrinking to purely human dimensions.

It is significant and revealing in this respect that not all sculptures of the period under consideration are composed according to the principles outlined above. In Elūrā, for instance, two types of sculptures of entirely different character are found side by side, one type on the inner walls of the Cave-temples and also under the porches of the Kailāsanātha-temple, and the other type on all outer walls. Those inside the shrines and under the porches are strictly concentric in their lay-out, while those on the outer walls are freer and more fanciful in composition. Their forms are equally vigorous and palpitating, but on the whole they lack that concerted, penetrating intensity particular to the sculptures built on a concentric ground-plan. Since both are coeval, it looks as if the difference in treatment were not accidental, but an intentional and conscious adaptation to the different purposes the images had to serve. The sculptures on the outer walls were probably meant to be seen in passing only, by those who approached the temple or made the pradakṣinā (circumambulation) and had no other purpose than to attune the mind to the presence of the divinity inside the shrine. For these the narrative and dramatic aspects would be appropriate. But the sculptures in the inner halls were certainly meant to serve prolonged meditation and contemplation in the search of inner realization, and to be witnesses of rituals, ceremonies and also perhaps of secret initiations. They had to appeal to higher levels of consciousness, in order to rouse the devotee to an awareness of the transcendent symbolism which they contained. To become effective instruments of spiritual realization, they had to plunge their roots deeper, and derive their configuration from something that lay beyond the anthropomorphic visual image.

The language of the traditional artist was, in those early periods, of the same symbolic order as that of the scriptures. The language of sacred scriptures is never rationalistic, it does not reason with arguments, it speaks with images and parables, which appeal to a deeper sensitivity and knock at secret doors that, once unlocked, give access to infinite avenues of thought and experience. Behind the sacred Word lie vast prospects unsuspected by the rational mind, in which not only the contemplative

Yogin, but also the artist finds scope for realizing his vision of the Divine. The artist translates the mystery of the Word into the mystery of Form, both having their roots in the same unscrutable ground of Being. And just as in verbal formulation correct pronunciation, metre, intonation and pitch are essential to the efficacy of the sacred Word, in form-expression consistency in composition, according to fundamental principles, is as important as the correctness of attitudes, proportions, features and attributes of divine figures. Pleasing the eye is not the ultimate end. What matters, is the efficacy of the formulation, which has, just as a mantra, to activate divine powers in the depth of the human soul. Only then has it fulfilled its real function.

In his very remarkable book "Kunstform und Yoga im Indischen Kultbild" (Berlin 1926) Heinrich Zimmer analyses the difference between the ideals of classical (Greek) art and those of the religious art of India. He states that the first is inspired by the visual experience of the outer world, from which it almost exclusively draws its subject matter, and therefore primarily appeals to the sense of sight. Determined essentially by Plato's philosophy of the archetypal "Ideas" or spiritual prototypes, of which the appearances of the physical worlds are valid and true expressions, this art seeks the glorification of divinity in the beauty of existence, in the harmony of natural, living forms. The second, on the contrary, rooted in a transcendental inner vision, considers the form-elements of the natural world as Māyā, as illusion, and uses them merely as instruments for expressing an essential, metaphysical conception. Here the beauty of form is meant to challenge the eye only in order to provoke inner contemplation. All the various classes of Indian religious art are but symbols of a divine presence, and they vary only in their degree of abstraction: The yantra is a purely linear diagram, the maṇḍala is a geometrical diagram filled with figural symbols, and the pratimā is a figural composition arranged on a geometrical pattern. These three forms of representation have identical functions and are therefore equivalent and interchangeable. Their forms are meant to fix the mind of the devotee, who, by loading them with the spiritual content of his meditations, can reach the realization of their true significance. This, in short, is the line of Zimmer's argument, which he substantiates by quotation and discussion of numerous passages from the Purāṇas and from the Tantras, most abundantly from the latter.

This equivalence between yantras, maṇḍalas and pratimās, Zimmer, however, considers to be limited to their common function as supports for meditation and not to inhere in their form, Rather, he stresses a fundamental difference between the formal aspect of figural compositions and that of other types of yantras. Whereas geometrical yantras, according to Zimmer, present a bird's eye's view of the entire symbol-context of an image, in which the main divinity occupies the centre and the secondary aspects or emanations are concentrically arrayed around it in all directions of space, figural compositions are by their very nature limited to the front-view, and all secondary aspects, instead of being ordered concentrically, are set side by side in plain juxtaposition. Therefore, he argues, there is neither formal and structural, nor dynamic relationship between the parts, and such images are less apt to present a full and comprehensive vision of a divinity than abstract, purely geometrical configurations.

Although my investigations were carried out independently and from a different point of view, they fully corroborate and substantiate Zimmer's thesis as far as his general line of thought is concerned. But, if my findings be correct, that figural compositions are equally based on an underlying, although hidden, concentric organization, they would prove that the equivalence of yantras and pratimās is not confined to their function alone, but involves their very form.

After having analysed with great acumen the fundamental differences in the ideals and aims of classical Greek and Hindu art, Zimmer does not seem to draw the consequences of his own theory. He persists in judging by western classical criteria the formal organization of Indian images, and thus misses the peculiar structural and dynamic nexus of their forms, bound to a common centre, and is lead to consider the ingredients of an Indian pratimā as nothing more than a rather haphazard assemblage of the relevant features and attributes of a divinity. To Greek images alone he concedes the distinction of having a perfect structural organization of forms and lines, capable of leading the eye along an irrational system of movements towards its ultimate harmonious integration.

Later however, in the chapter on the mudrās and the canon of proportions in Hindu art, certain doubts on this point appear to have crept into Zimmer's mind. He admits that the Hindu theory of art still withholds the secret of the formal affinity between the figural composition and the geometrical scheme, and thinks that only the study of the purely linear schemes of the yantras could sharpen the eye for the general properties of their figural relatives, properties inherent in their nature of being essential expressions of a supersensible order.

III

There is a widespread notion in modern times that principles of composition or any system and law binding an artist would have a deadening effect on his work, that it would kill the free flow of his inspiration and reduce it to a thoughtless and mechanical repetition of patterns. This assumption was most probably caused by the observation that in certain periods of decline in traditional styles it does happen that art becomes a product of ready-made formulas and results in stereotyped monotony. But this only happens when the principles, adopted at a time when the art was in its full vigour, are no longer understood and are mechanically perpetuated without knowledge of their reason and meaning.

This is, however, no argument against the intrinsic value of principles of composition and it would be utterly misleading to take the symptoms of decadence as the sole and inevitable result of artistic principles. Composition in the plastic and pictorial arts is exactly the same as metre and rhyme in poetry or as rhythm and measure in music. A thought expressed in metrical verse lives on a different plane of reference than the same thought expressed in prose. Musical notes strung together without measure or rhythm cannot even form an intelligible musical phrase. When all other classes of artistic expressions are dependent on laws of composition, why should such laws be deemed superfluous or even harmful to the language of form? The primary function of art is not just to reflect human experience on the shallow mirror of sensation, nor to draw this experience untransfigured from the chaotic subconscious layers of the soul. Still less can it be its aim to produce an accidental combination of forms or colours in order to express impulses grown in the wilderness of individual fancy. Art at its best wants to translate human experience into a compact supra-individual formulation.

One has only to consider any of the great art traditions of the past, be it Egyptian, Greek, Gothic, Hindu or Chinese, to understand that their greatness and their specific character cannot be explained by that, which by an oversimplification is called the "racial genius". One will be forced to recognize that nothing less than the spiritual foundation of doctrines and principles that governed the intellectual and moral life and all artistic manifestations of these people could produce such formidable results.

In a country like India, where the methods of disciplining impulses, of controlling physical and mental processes, of ordering the chaotic world of the subconscious and of concentrating thought, have for millennia been elaborated in theory and practiced in life, it would be rather strange to find no trace of such methods in the conception and practice of the arts. Composition is a serious discipline of concentration, which, exactly as all other such disciplines, is not meant to smother inborn faculties, but on the contrary to enhance and strengthen them to a far higher degree of efficiency.

The Hindu sculptures analysed in the following pages give ample evidence of the fact that a studied way of composition, far from impairing the vigour of conception and execution, enhances it by a powerful substratum of transcendent thought. The profound knowledge with which these sculptures are composed imparts to their forms a validity and finality not attainable otherwise. The science of composition does not detract from the exuberant life that animates all forms, nor does it destroy in the least the imprint of an original personal conception. Certain fundamental patterns are common to many of these sculptures, yet in spite of that each of them is a single and unique creation, which has no model and no copy elsewhere. These artists could never have had such a vivid grasp of the significant moment, nor could they have achieved such a sensuous and powerful treatment of form or such delicate inflections of feeling and expression, had they not, apart from their science of composition, been in full possession of their personality and of a profound knowledge of nature. It is in fact the power of expression in these sculptures that produces their irresistible fascination, long before their scientific composition and its deeper implications become apparent.

The artists who created these sculptures enjoyed the tremendous privilege of carving out of the living rock, and it is understandable that the contact with the primordial element, with the backbone of the earth, nourished and sustained their live grasp of ultimate realities. But modern man may ask how it was, that in spite of the feeling of sovereign freedom that the monumental and bottomless dimensions of the rock must have given to them, they deliberately submitted to studied rules of composition?

The traditional artist was dedicated to the realization of a metyphysical or religious idea and not to the realization of his own artistic personality. Hence supra-individual principles, on which to base his work, were not considered as fetters, but as a help, and he would not have understood what is meant by "artistic freedom", since he never felt the lack of it. The rules according to which he worked were not arbitrary or conventional, but were derived from spiritual conceptions, which for him had universal validity. These rules were based on simple, immutable cosmic laws. They established the essential fundamentals, which were broad and comprehensive enough to allow him to work out their application in the fire and freedom of his own inner vision. The acceptance of these fundamentals, his identification with them made him feel secure, and the discipline of composition, if anything, concentrated and directed his owerflowing powers to greater effectiveness. Where everything grows out of and is controlled by the same principle, there is no difference between law and freedom. Law then IS freedom, and freedom IS law.

It is sufficient to compare the great variety of styles in the few schools of Indian Art which we are here studying to understand what enormous latitude was left to regional and individual development, in spite of common laws of composition. From the sober, austere, sensitive, almost byzantine form-language of Mahābalipuram to the full-blooded, solid and ample vitality of Bādāmī and the exuberant, dramatic, exalted baroque of Elūrā, there is such a vast range of different form-conceptions and emotions, that it seems at first sight almost impossible to believe in the basic unity of their laws of composition.

All these different styles represent organic growths conditioned by the character of various people, by their spiritual and artistic experience accumulated through considerable periods of time. Through the work of successive generations of craftsmen the outer form evolved together with its content and became of one particular cast. It grew together as does body and soul, and every artist, through his individual contribution, added something to the development and maturing of an accepted type. Thus every individual achievement was added and merged into the collective effort until it reached a point of perfection beyond which human ingenuity could not go. Masterpieces like those of Elūrā, Bādāmī, Elephanta and Mahābalipuram represent such a supreme consummation, in which formal experience, accumulated and transmitted by inheritance and training, came to coalesce with a great spiritual vision. Only at rare points, at the confluence of a powerful tradition of craftmanship with the flame of a great spiritual dedication can such miracles become possible.

The complete self-surrender of the craftsman to his mission and his work is testified by his anonymity. No personal vanity induced him to put his name under any of these incomparable masterpieces, because his only aim was to serve the gods he worshipped and to extol their glory. This is a corollary to his acceptance of laws and principles, which he considered to be equally emanations of the Divine.

Be it said once more, that form-creations of this order speak their own, particular and independent language, and cannot be considered as mere substitutes for sacred words, or as mere helps to the illiterate. There were times when literacy was far from being a prerequisite to education and knowledge, and visual comprehension was therefore not atrophied as it is today. In such times sculptures and paintings were transmitters of supersensual realities on the highest level, and by appealing to a live visual sensitivity, they induced meditation and contemplation and thus became bridges from the world of Māyā to the world of transcendent Reality.

From all that has been said so far it should, however, not be inferred that the secret of such works of art could be fathomed or rationally explained by the 'logic of composition' alone, mentioned in the beginning. This 'logic' is not the primary act by which a work of art comes into being, but a secondary, intellectual operation, bent on perfectly attuning the outer form to its content. The primary inception is not a fruit of rational thinking, but has its source in a vision of truth in the depth of the human soul. It is a grace that may be induced by dedication and meditation, but that will never obey will or calculation. Its ultimate essence lies beyond analysis and can truly be apprehended only when in the beholder corresponding inner chords are touched and begin to vibrate.

But, the form and particularly the composition, is the body of that vision. And, just as the soul of man cannot come into manifest existence without a body in which to incarnate, the ultimate thing that inspires a work of art cannot come into being without an adequate form of expression. Form is the vehicle, the instrument through which the message is transmitted. It can fulfil this purpose only when it is in perfect conformity with its burden. Understood in this sense, it is of supreme importance.

From the geometrical, basic lay-out depends the adequacy of the expression. Unless the basic pattern exactly espouses the fundamental conception, the sculpture, however cleverly and beautifully done, will not reach its full symbol-value. In the abstract figuration, in the 'logic of the composition' lies its deepest meaning.

IV

The great sculptures in the Brāhmanical rock-cut temples of Elūrā, Bādāmī and Mahābalipuram are carved in deep relief into the walls of large or small halls lying in front of the garbha-gṛha, the sanctum, and thus corresponding to the maṇḍapas in constructed temples. These sculptures are of colossal dimensions, reaching from the floor up to the ceiling of the halls.

Three of the sculptures at Elūrā that will be analysed, namely the Mahālakṣmī, the Jñāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti and the Gajasaṁhāramūrti are under the great porches of the Kailāsanātha Temple, and are of the 8th-9th Cent. A.D. The others, which are presumably of the 7th-8th Cent. A.D. are carved in rows on either side of big halls in front of two shrines, one dedicated to Śiva, with a liṅgam in the garbha-gṛha, and the other with an empty garbha-gṛha, considered to have been dedicated to Bhavānī, the Śakti of Śiva. They are composed within square or rectangular fields, framed in and separated from one another by architectural wall-pilasters. Although the temples are dedicated to Śiva or to his Śakti, the images adorning the walls of the maṇḍapas are Śaiva on one side only, and Vaiṣṇava on the other, both being of equal size and importance.

The reliefs in Bādāmī are of the 6th Cent. A.D. They are carved along galleries or verandahs under overhanging rocky ledges, that give access to pillared halls or maṇḍapas with bare walls leading into the garbhagṛha. Two of these rock-cut temples have Vaiṣṇava images only, and one is dedicated to Śiva, with Śaiva images in the verandah and a dancing Śiva on the rock-wall outside the shrine. Here the two classes of images, the Vaiṣṇava and the Śaiva, are neatly divided between different halls.

The reliefs of Mahābalipuram are of the 7th Cent. A.D. and cover the side-walls of small maṇḍapas cut into massive boulders of granite. Here the shrines are also dedicated to Śiva, but the imagery is both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava. In one cave the panels on the two sides have the unusual form of very elongated rectangles, lying horizontally.

The sculptures in the rock-cut temples of Elephantā should have been included in this study, since they belong to the same period and, to all appearances, are composed on the same principles as the others mentioned above. But unfortunately their mutilated condition does not allow an entirely reliable reconstitution of all their parts, a necessary condition for a dependable analysis.

What were the doctrines or schools of thought that inspired the architects and sculptors of these early temples is still an open question, the solution of which we shall have to leave to systematic investigations by Art-historians and scholars conversant with the religious trends of those times. Not being competent in the matter, we do not express any opinion. We would only like to propose a few considerations which might be taken into account when scrutinizing the symbolic content of these images and when tracing the source and origin of their inspiration.

The presence of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava images in the same temple, their combination and juxtaposition are certainly proof of a remarkably unsectarian outlook in the schools of thought that created these monuments. With reference to Elūrā Mr. James Burgess says: "Its sculptures bear testimony to the prevalence of the eclectic Smārtta school......". The meaning of this statement is that these temples date back to the time before the 9th century, a time when the sectarian split between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas had not yet taken place, a time when Hindus, still close to the way of thinking of the older Upaniṣads and the Smṛtis, could worship the Supreme under various aspects and forms, without giving exclusive importance to one above all others. The awareness of the great, nameless absolute Being behind all of them still prevailed over its various personified forms. These were only considered as different ways by which the Supreme could be approached. Worship, however, came to be crystallized around five main Divinities that bore the names of Gaṇapati, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti and Sūrya. Considered as five equivalent aspects of the Supreme they were often united within one single temple. This represented what is now called the Smārtta school. Even to-day those who take this broad view and keep outside the grooves of either exclusive Vaiṣṇavism or Śaivism and who worship these five Gods are called Smārttas [1].

Although these five aspects of God are found side by side in the Elūrā temples, the distinct prevalence of Śiva images and symbols in all the shrines does not make this attribution entirely convincing. All Hindu shrines at Elūrā are dedicated to Śiva, because all have a Śiva-liṅgam in their garbha-gṛha, with exception of Cave No. XIV, whose garbha-gṛha contains a rectangular kuṇḍa and is supposed to have been dedicated to Bhavānī, the Śakti or Female Energy of Śiva. Not a single temple is dedicated to Viṣṇu, but a number of important Vaiṣṇava images are carved in prominent places in and outside these Śaiva temples. The Kailāsanātha Temple, for example, carries on the left front wall of its enclosure enormous figures of Viṣṇu's manifestations, and in both the temples No. XIV and No. XV one side of the maṇḍapam has an exclusively Vaiṣṇava imagery.

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[1] I am indebted to Prof. V. Raghavan, Head of the Sanskrit Department of the Madras University for elucidating this point.

If in temples dedicated to Śiva, Vaiṣṇava images were not placed as āvaraṇa devatas, as in later times, but were given such prominent positions, their symbolism must have been considered equivalent and complementary to that of Śaiva images. If they were placed face to face in the same temples and given the same importance, there must have been distinct ideological correspondences between the two.

The subject-matter of the imagery in these temples is on the whole drawn from the Purāṇas, but the very pronounced geometrical symbolism, which the analysis of their composition revealed, could hardly be attributed to purely paurāṇic conceptions. It is much more in conformity with tāntric doctrines to interpret the mystery of existence and to represent cosmic and metaphysical conceptions in terms of geometrical symbolism. The outlook of the Tantras is as unsectarian and catholic as that of the Smārtta school. All divinities are considered by them as different aspects only of the one Supreme Principle and its inherent Creative Energy, of Parama-Śiva and Ādya-Śakti. Their mantras and hymns are addressed to all the gods, to Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Lakṣmī, Durgā, Kālī and many others, who are all so many manifestations and ways leading towards the ultimate supreme Reality.

The temples of Elūrā are centred around the figure of Śiva, and therefore, if the hypothesis of their being tāntric be true, they should depend on the Śaiva-Āgamas, which give Paramātman, the Supreme Principle, the name of Paramaśiva. The Kailāsanātha Temple, which, as its name implies, is dedicated to Śiva as the Lord of Kailāsa, has a Śiva-liṅga in its garbha-gṛha and a colossal image of Dakṣiṇāmūrti under the porch between the main shrine and the Nandī-maṇḍapa. Jñāna Dakṣiṇāmūrti, who is the great universal Guru and symbolizes the light of supreme, divine Consciousness, transcending all human knowledge, appears thus to be the Iṣṭadeva of the temple.

This aspect of Śiva, whose incarnation on earth the great Śaṅkarācārya is considered to have been, has become the most representative symbol of the Advaita Vedānta School. But this pure Māyāvāda Advaita, which considers the whole creation as unreal, as a play of illusion, and the Supreme Essence as the only Reality, has by its abstraction from the world of forms and its tendency towards purely spiritual speculation, never been very prolific in the production of imagery. Therefore it is hardly conceivable that the schools of thought, which created these temples with their wealth of exuberantly vital sculpture could be purely Advaita Vedānta.

On the other hand, the Śiva-Śakti Āgama, which sees in every manifestation of the universe a product and outflow of the dynamic Life-power inherent in the Śakti aspect of the Supreme, can with greater likeliness be credited with such an exuberant growth of imagery, recreating in the language of form the essence of its doctrines. The figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti Śiva, the Supreme Guru, in whose heart man finds release, is for the Tantras an equally essential and significant symbol.

There is another and in a certain sense even more relevant feature in these images, which seems to derive directly from tāntric doctrines. It is the emphasis laid on the cakras in the figures of these divinities, and of their position with respect to the entire composition. Whatever cakra is made to coincide with the central point, the madhya-bindu of the composition, that cakra determines the character of the entire image. A Lakṣmī image whose centre lies at the navel, at the Maṇipūra cakra, has a different aspect from a Lakṣmī, whose centre is placed at the throat, at the Viśuddha cakra. And a Śiva whose centre is at the Mūlādhāra cakra, at the Earth-centre, is different from a Śiva whose centre is at the Anāhata or Prāṇa cakra. This will be shown in the analysis of the single images.

From a purely formal point of view I should like to add the following consideration which would also seem to lend a certain support to the hypothesis that these images belong to the tāntric School. I mentioned earlier, that the concentric diagrams on which these images are composed call to mind the structure of yantras. I also stated that the disposition of their forms along the lines of essential space-directions resolves these compositions into a play of dynamic stresses. These stresses, in various and innumerable combinations achieve certain figurations, which reveal their essential meaning. The protagonists of the drama, whose movements are governed by these dynamic lines, cease to be persons and become pure embodiments of certain powers, actions or tendencies.

It is an elementary and obvious truth that the particular form-language of any art is conditioned by the cosmic, psychological and metaphysical conceptions that lie at its base. It is however much more difficult to say with precision, how the spiritual background conditons and in what way it manifests itself in the work of art. It is therefore only with the greatest caution that I venture to say: It would not be surprising if the Śiva-Śākta School, which conceives the whole universe as the product of an unending emission of vibrations and stresses in the Ether of Pure Consciousness should create, even without deliberate intention and merely as the natural outflow of its world-conception, an art operating entirely by means of dynamic stresses. Should such a postulate be correct, it would of course apply not to the Elūrā sculpture alone, but also to that of Bādāmī and others, and very pre-eminently to that of Mahābalipuram, which even more than all others seems to be divested of material weight, refined into pure lines of stress, into the simplest and most condensed formal expression of its content.

Questions of this kind are still very far from being solved. Studies on the real nature of this art have only begun, and it will require a good deal of further and deeper investigation into the schools of thought that created these temples and images, before we can hope to penetrate further into the mysteries they still present to our minds.

V

BASIC SCHEMES OF COMPOSITION

> The perfection of art, where there is no room for preferences, art being comparable to science in its certainty, and differing from science only in being ordered to operation.
> (St. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol. II 2, quoted by A. K. Coomaraswamy in "The Christian and Oriental, or true philosophy of Art", Note 15.)

The diagrams, which I assume to have been at the base of these compositions, depend on four fundamental elements, by which the relief-field is organized: a centre (bindu), a surrounding circle, a certain number of diameters dividing the circle in regular sectors, and chords parallel to the diameters connecting the points of intersection of circle and diameters.

The centre of the composition is established at the crossing-point of the two main axes, the vertical and the horizontal middle-line. When the panel is an exact square or rectangle the centre of the composition coincides with the geometrical centre of the relief-field. But sometimes there are irregularities in these squares or rectangles which may be accounted for by the fact that the architectural frame-work in these rock-cut temples is only fictitious and not subject to any functional or constructive necessity, and is therefore at times treated somewhat casually. In certain cases the sculptors may have also been confronted with unexpected vagaries in the rock, which compelled them to make certain adjustments. In such cases the geometrical centre is no guide and the form-context of the sculpture has to be examined in order to find the point where all relevant space-directions converge and meet. The centre of the composition is generally found at this point. Often some minor ornamental accessories, inscribed in the bigger form-masses, like belts, garlands and yajñopavītas mark by a delicate incision the vertical and horizontal middle-lines and help to find the centre at the point where they intersect.

The number of diameters by which the circle is divided determines the angle of inclination of the oblique axes, that is to say their direction in space. Space-directions determined by the diameters control all forms and movements. On their angles of inclination depend also the angles prevalent in the outlay of the composition. These angles are either equal to those between the radii, or they are their multiples, or eventually fractions thereof.

On the correct size of the enclosing circle depend the measurements of all subdivisions. In regular square panels the circles are mostly inscribed in the architectural frame-work. In rectangular panels the diameter of the circle is established either on its longer or on its shorter side. Mostly it is the height of the panel that determines the diameter of the circle, but it is not possible to give hard and fast rules. The form-context is always a reliable guide.

The points where the diameters intersect the circle are first connected by vertical and horizontal chords. These produce a network of square and rectangular interspaces of varying proportions, decreasing in size from the centre towards the circumference. They fix the position and the proportions of all form-elements inside the composition and their disposition in space in relation to each other. Horizontal lines limit vertical extension, while vertical lines limit horizontal extension. This network of vertical and horizontal lines dividing the relief-field will in this work be called: SPACE-DIVISION or MEASURE.

The same points on the circle are further connected by chords running parallel to the oblique diameters. These chords create a similar network of lines that intersects the previous one at given angles. The lines of this network determine all stresses and movements within the composition, and with the movements create the time-sequences. In most compositions only a limited number of oblique diameters are relevant, in a few however all are used. The greater the number of diameters used, the greater the complexity of the form-context[1]. This system of oblique lines, on account of its kinetic character will be called TIME-DIVISION or MOVEMENT.

SPACE-DIVISION and TIME-DIVISION, measure and movement, are intimately interwoven in every composition, like warp and woof on a loom. One is static and the other kinetic, and interlaced they constitue the integrated whole of the composition. But in order to analyse the form-context in detail it is necessary to first dissociate the two aspects of measure and movement and to examine them separately. Then only can their interaction and combination and their final synthesis be clearly represented. The synthesis of both aspects, and the meaning that results from it is here called INTEGRATION and INTERPRETATION.

Every composition is a dynamic texture of stresses and movements that enter into various relationships with one another. They are either concurrent, or opposite, either convergent or divergent, either sustaining and completing, or arresting and breaking one another's impact.

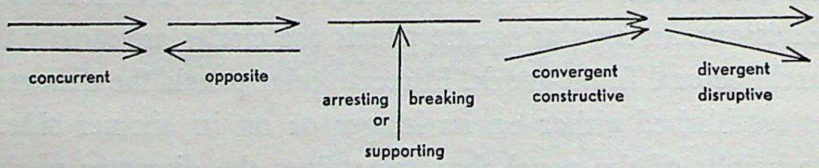

Fig. 3

Lines, running parallel in the same direction sustain and enforce one anothers movement, whereas lines running parallel in opposite directions neutralize one another.

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[1] This perhaps presents an analogy to the laws, which in Indian music govern the composition of the Rāgas. There also only a certain limited number of śrutis (quarter-tones) of the total scale of 22 or 24 śrutis are admitted in any particular Rāga, which express its mood and specific feeling, while all other śrutis are strictly debarred from it.

The maximum tension that can occur between two movements is along lines meeting or crossing at right angles. They may either combine their efforts, supporting and consolidating one another, or they may clash, arresting and disrupting one another's impact.

Convergent lines are closing to and are therefore constructive, tending towards concentration of efforts. Divergent lines are opening out and therefore dispersing and weakening their forces.

Within these fundamental tendencies infinite combinations with a great variety of shadings are possible, depending on the strength of the single movements and on the action and influence they exercise upon one another. Their relationship may be positive or negative, constructive or disruptive, cooperative or dissolvent.

In the texture of every composition all space-directions have their complementary directions. Two space-directions will be considered complementary in this analysis, if one is the mirror-reflection of the other in either the vertical or the horizontal middle-line. They are used almost everywhere as balancing and stabilizing factors.

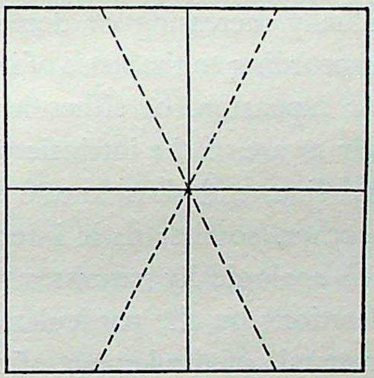

Fig. 4. Dotted lines are complementary to one another.

When complementary movements are equivalent, the composition is symmetrical, stable and balanced. When complementary movements are unequal and one predominates, there is a disequilibrium in the composition. There is a difference of potential which creates a flow, that is to say, there is dynamic action displacing the figures.

Every straight form or line has a projection in space in the direction of its run, which far exceeds its actual size and is theoretically infinite. This projection always works in the lengthwise direction of the form, and although it might find obstacles and may be interrupted by other lines and forms, its impact subsists and creates a continuum between distant and separate form-elements that lie on its trajectory in the same direction.

The reason for this projection is that all forms and lines tend towards fulfilment, towards completion and full development. Every part of a form or line is therefore indicative of the character of the whole. The straight line is part of an infinite extension, and even if truncated, it preserves the potentiality of this extension. Any other line appearing even at a distance on this invisible extension, is immediately recognized as part of the same line. Even if no second line appears to pick up its movement, the infinite projection into space is always potentially present, and in plastic and pictorial representation has always to be taken into account.

A similar thing happens with curved lines or forms, they also want to fulfil their innate tendencies. Every curve with a constant curvature is part of a circle, and has in itself the tendency to close into a full circle. In plastic representation such a curve collects and rounds up movements and therefore creates an element of rest without stresses. It gathers up movements as a pool gathers up the inflowing waters.

A curve with a gradually increasing or decreasing curvature results in a spiral line that will, according to the sense of its run show a movement of either contraction or expansion, of either involution or evolution.

The artist is intuitively aware of the intrinsic tendencies and potentialities of every form and line, and thus knows how to put them into relationship with each other, so that their interplay should produce a drama of stresses, which analogically expresses a drama of powers and wills. All these considerations on the particular character of forms and lines and on the fundamentals of the lay-out of these compositions will find their demonstration in the analysis of the single sculptures.

The sculptures, studied one by one, are placed under different headings, not according to site and period, but according to subject-matter. This will allow a comparison between sculptures representing the same subject at different places and in different times, and an appreciation of the numerous possibilities that one and the same basic diagram offers to the imagination and ingenuity of the artist. In the first part Vaiṣṇava images will be analysed because their composition is, on the whole, more simple than that of Śaiva sculptures. They serve as an introduction to this perhaps somewhat unfamiliar way of looking at a work of art. In the second part Śaiva images are analysed, and here the synthesis or integration that follows is sometimes expanded into a tentative interpretation of the possible symbolic implications of their form-content.

In order to avoid tedious repetitions while analysing the single panels we set out in the following a summary of the essential, basic points that should be remembered, because they apply to all these sculptures without exception. At the beginning of every analysis a short description of the subject and its manner of presentation is given, so that even those not familiar with Indian Iconography should be able to grasp its implications.

1.) The relief-sculptures are enclosed within a square or rectangular architectural frame-work, but their composition is conditioned by the specific divisions of a circle circumscribing the aggregate of their forms. When the relief-field is square, this circle is of equal diameter, inscribed in the square. (Plate I, Fig. 5)

2.) When the relief-field is rectangular, the diameter of the circle is equal either to the longer or the shorter side. It mostly corresponds to the height of the panel. In upright rectangles the sides of the panels mostly coincide with the second or the outermost vertical chord of the circle. (Plate I, Fig. 6 and 7)

3.) Horizontal rectangles are mostly constructed by adding two vertical stripes on both sides of the square (Plate I, Fig. 8)

But when the horizontal rectangle is very elongated another method is adopted: First a central circle is drawn to the height of the panel, and divided by four or six diameters, and by vertical chords connecting their points of intersection with the circle. Then two lateral circles of equal diameter are added, which have their centres in the middle of the first vertical chords of the central circle. The lines enclosing all three circles give the proportion of the rectangle, approximately 2 : 3 in the case of a sexpartite circle. In another case of an octopartite circle the outer circles exceed a little the width of the panel, but they cannot be dispensed with, because their diameters are relevant in the form-context. (Plate I, Fig. 9 and 10)

4.) The essential features of any sculpture are contained within the directing circle. What is outside the circle is less relevant. Mostly the outer corners are covered by projecting brackets above and by pilaster-bases below.

5.) The directing circle is sectioned by six, eight or twelve diameters, the first being always the vertical (madhya-sutra) and the second the horizontal (madhya-prastha). At the centre, where all diameters cross, is the hub of the composition, the madhya-bindu, the point of reference for all space-directions.

6.) The circle is further divided into segments by chords drawn through the points of intersection of circle and diameters. These chords are parallel to the diameters by which the circle is divided, and no other chords are admitted.

7.) Vertical and horizontal chords form a network that determines position and size of every form-element. This division is static and will hereafter be called SPACE-DIVISION or MEASURE (Plate II, Fig. 11).

8.) Oblique diameters and chords determine the direction of all movements and the time-sequence according to which they evolve. This division will hereafter be called TIME-DIVISION or MOVEMENT. (Plate II, Fig. 12).

9.) In Space-division all vertical and horizontal chords are used, while in Time-division generally only a selection of diameters with their parallel chords are used, which emphasize certain space-directions to the exclusion of others.

10.) From the interaction of measure and movement, of the space-and the time-element arises that particular configuration and that particular rhythm, which gives any composition its specific character and meaning. The synthesis of the Space- and the Time-division will hereafter be called INTEGRATION.

11 Space-direction and angles determine the character of a composition. Space-direction obtained by any division of the circle implies the constant recurrence in the composition of the basic angle between the radii, or its multiples, or of fractions thereof.

12.) Every diameter or chord has its complementary diameter or chord, which is its mirror-reflection on either the horizontal or the vertical middleline. They are present in every composition.

13.) When movements in certain directions have to be stressed, parallel or concurrent movements are brought into play. When movements have to be balanced, complementary movements are used. When movements have to be arrested or broken, opposite stresses, crossing at determined angles are used.

14.) The three fundamental possibilities: movements stressed by parallel or concurrent lines, movements balanced by complementaries, and movements opposed by contrary stresses are to be found

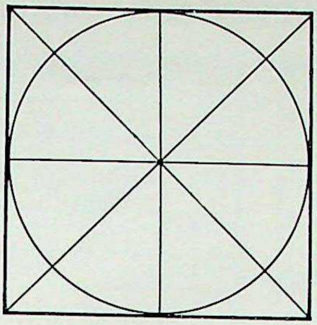
Fig. 5

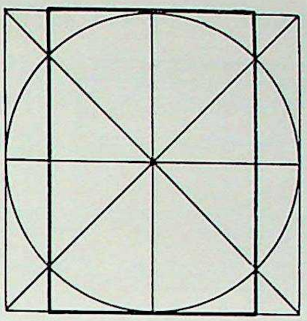
Fig. 6

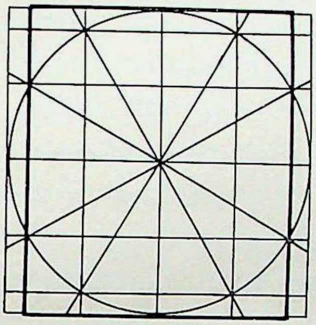
Fig. 7

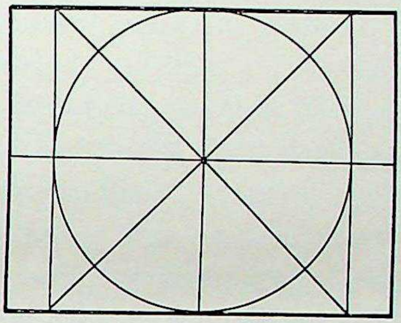
Fig. 8

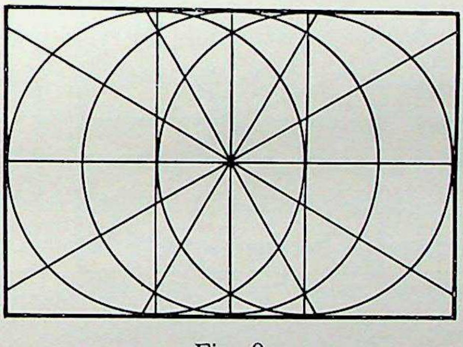
Fig. 9

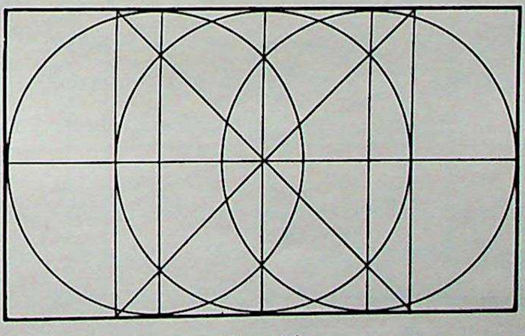
Fig. 10

PLATE II

Fig. 11. EXAMPLES OF SPACE-DIVISIONS

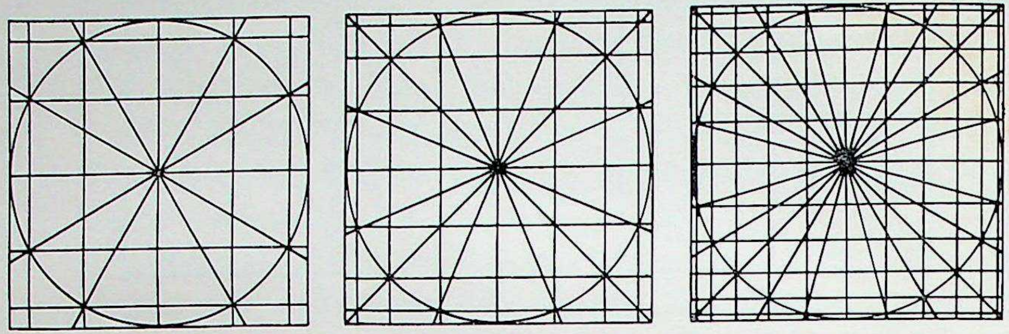

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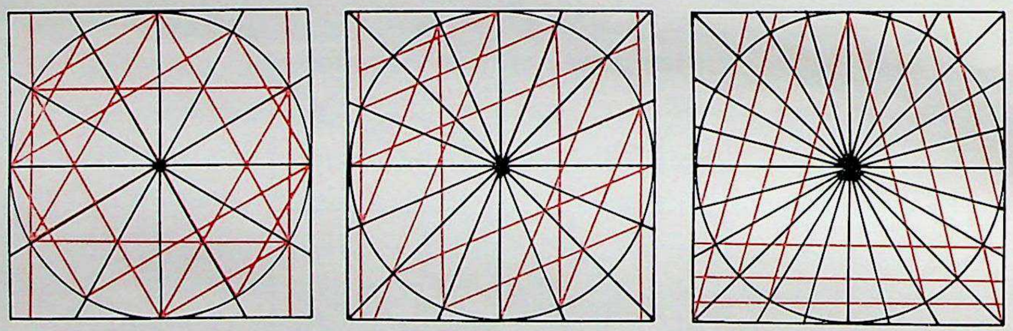
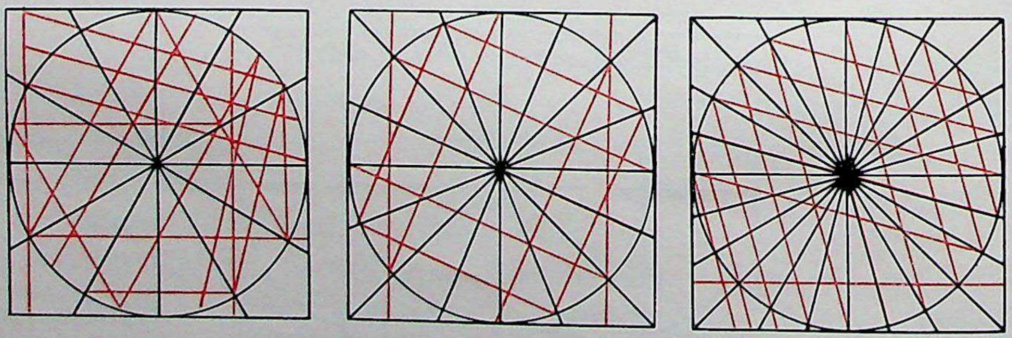
Fig. 12. EXAMPLES OF TIME-DIVISIONS



Nāṭarāja, Elūrā, Cave XIV

Viṣṇu Trivikrama, Elūrā, Cave XV

Dakṣināmūrti Śiva, Elūrā, Kailāsa



Nāṭarāja, Bādāmī

Varāha Avatāra, Bādāmī, Cave II

Gajasaṁhāramūrti, Elūrā, Kailāsa

in every composition, only their disposition and proportions vary and give every one its specific character.

15.) One and the same form-element may participate in more than one space-direction, according to whether its axis, or one or more of its outlines are involved.

16.) Participation through the axis is the most complete and effective participation. It means that the entire volume of the form is thrown into a given direction and generally determines essential movements. Its character is plastic.

17.) Participation through outline is more linear in character and is mostly used in space-division. It assigns place and position, and divides form-complexes from one another.

18.) A third kind of participation is possible through sharp lines inside bigger forms, such as are produced by the ornaments on the body of the figures, by belts, garlands, necklaces, wristlets, armlets, anklets etc. They become significant when they mark an essential space-direction that runs across the body, or when they divide a limb into rhythmic proportions ,or give an accent at a relevant point, or give a line of demarcation at the transition of one form or movement into another.

19.) A movement hardly ever stands alone, nor is any movement confined to its own limited extension. Its action is continued either by repetition or by projection in space. It has either an echo or a prolongation somewhere else in the relief-field. This creates the interrelation of all forms and the continuity of all movements.

20.) To create an effective movement, at least two opposite stresses have to come into operation, or it has to be brought to life by the contrast of static elements. Movement will never become effective, except when confronted with antagonistic forces.

21.) The life of every composition depends not only on the counterplay of movement and quiescence, but also on the opposition of big and small form-elements, of rounded and straight movements, of sizable plain, even forms and of aggregates of multiple smaller forms.

22.) A particular accent or highlight is sometimes introduced in a composition by one single form, mostly by a weapon, which does not conform to any of the fundamental space-directions, and strikes the eye by falling out of the general form-context.

23.) Since the compositions are not based on a simple division of the relief-field, but on the division of the inscribed circle, the size of the space-divisions and with them the size of most form-elements decreases from the centre towards the circumference.

24.) But when forms are disposed, not along the full diameters but concentrically along the radii only, as it happens sometimes in the Time-division, the space divisions grow from the centre outwards and the movements become either centripetal or centrifugal.

25.) Between the centre and the circumference of the circle there is the indissoluble cohesion of polarity, from which nothing can escape. The movements thrown out by the centre are collected by the circumference and reversed towards the centre, or, an unending movement may arise and flow around the circumference, held together by the centre.

For the sake of brevity and convenience we shall give to some of the elements of the diagrams the nomenclature used in Sanskrit. The central point will be called MADHYA-BINDU, the central vertical middle-line will be called MADHYA-SŪTRA, and the central horizontal line will be called MADHYA-PRASTHA.

The terms "right" and "left" do not refer to the right and left of the onlooker, but always refer to the right and left side of the image, since the two sides of an image have their own symbolical significance.

PART ONE

VAIṢṆAVA IMAGES

State Museum Library * Lucknow *

CHAPTER ONE

NARASIṀHA AVATĀRA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE III

The powerful Asura King Hiraṇyakaśipu, after performing austerities for thousands of years, obtained a boon from Brahmā that he could not be killed by any weapon, neither by man nor by a god, neither inside the house, nor outside, neither by day nor by night. Thus he deemed himself to have become invulnerable and immortal, and demanded worship as an Immortal. All worshipped him, except his son Prahlāda, who was deeply devoted to Viṣṇu, and therefore refused to consider his father a god. This so incensed Hiraṇyakaśipu, that he submitted Prahlāda to inhuman tortures, in order to bend him to his will. But nothing could break Prahlāda's steadfastness and devotion, and when his father saw that all his punishments were in vain, he drew his sword and stepped down from his throne to kill his son. At this moment Viṣṇu, taking the form of a Man-Lion, burst forth from a pillar on the threshhold, at twilight between day and night, and seized Hiraṇyakaśipu with his claws, killed and disembowelled him. Thus he saved his devotee, without violating any of the conditions of the boon.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE IIIa

This composition is within a square extending from pilaster to pilaster and from the ground to the entablature. This square includes the base of the pilasters and the brackets that project into it. The brackets cover some portions of Narasiṁha's right upper hands, the upper part of the paraśu, and the entire cakra[1]. The directing circle exceeds the square only by its outermost segments and is divided by eight diameters.

---

[1] In the diagram the invisible parts as well as the broken legs of the two figures are marked in dotted lines.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = passes between the two bodies of Narasiṁha and Hiraṇyakaśipu and through their interlocked legs down to the lotus-pedestal. The panel is thus divided in two equal halves between the two contending enemies.

H′-B′ = from Narasiṁha's mukuṭa down behind his back to his hip and to the ground between his legs. The interspace contains the entire body of Narasiṁha with his head, but without the arms.
B-H = behind the back of the Asura to his hip and down in front of his left foot. The interspace contains his body, but without the head and all four left arms of Narasiṁha.

Thus the two central vertical interspaces on both sides of the madhya-sūtra contain the main parts of both figures with their interlocked legs, the lotus-pedestal and the scarf hanging between Viṣṇu's legs.

G′-C′ = from the end of the right bracket down to the foot of Narasiṁha. The interspace contains his four right arms, fanning out backwards, his left leg (broken) and the other end of the scarf.
C-G = from the end of the left bracket down to the heel of Hiraṇyakaśipu. The interspace holds his head and raised arm, his hand with the sword and his leg (broken).

The last two vertical interspaces between the brackets and the ground hold on the right side Viṣṇu's hands raised with the paraśu and the cakra, and on the left the Asura's hand raised with the shield and the top of his helmet.

In the vertical disposition of all form-elements the composition is almost symmetrical, but the accents and emphasis on the single parts are different. This will become more clear in the Time-Division.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = across Viṣṇu's right hand on the hip, across his raised thigh and the hip of the Asura, just below the line of his forearm holding the sword.

Madhya-bindu = in the lowest part of the gap between the two bodies.

F′-D = runs below the shoulder-line of the two figures and divides Narasiṁha's two lower right arms from the two upper ones.

In this first horizontal interspace above the madhyaprastha both the torsos are thrown against one another with the Asura's arms and Viṣṇu's two lower arms. There is correspondence between the loop formed by Viṣṇu's lowest arm bent towards the hip and the loop formed by the

Asura's arm and sword, with the difference that one has a forward drive while the other recedes.

G′-C = marks the lower limit of the brackets and the top of the Asura's helmet. It runs through the wrists of both Narasiṁha's raised hands and across his brow.

The interspace holds shoulders and faces of both figures, and the Asura's helmet. While the Asura's head is thrown backward and reaches only to the limit of this division, Viṣṇu's head is erect and reaches to the limit of the upper division together with the hand holding the śaṅkha and the hand raised to strike a blow.

Along the outer pilasters on either side Viṣṇu's paraśu and the Asura's shield limit the horizontal expansion by a set of vertical forms.

In the lower half of the panel there is a straightforward symmetry between the right and the left side. In the first interspace the interlocked knees occupy the centre, while the other legs are stemmed backwards towards the corners of the panel. Although they are broken, their positions are easily inferred from the two feet on the ground, which are at almost equal distance from the centre, occupied by the lotus-pedestal.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE IIIb

Essential diameters: B′-B, H-H′, D′-D, F′-F

This composition is determined by the interplay of four diameters, complementary in their functions. Two are almost equal in strength and the other two are graded.

B′-B = up through the interlocked knees and the shoulder of the Asura in the grip of Viṣṇu's hand. Viṣṇu's right shank and his arm raised with the śaṅkha follow this line.
C′-A = from Narasiṁha's left heel up along his leg and his back to his face and forehead.

Narasiṁha's entire body from his foot on the ground, his leg, his trunk, his face and left upper arm with the śaṅkha is channelled into the space between this line and the diameter B′-B. The drapery falling behind the leg is doubling and enforcing his movement.

D′-H′ = through Viṣṇu's arms to the top of his mukuṭa.
E′-G′ = from the hand with the paraśu to the hand raised to strike. In the last two interspaces all forms, Viṣṇu's mukuṭa and his arms, stand across.
A′-C = from the left side of the lotus-pedestal, across Hiraṇyakaśipu's body to the top of his mukuṭa.

The Asura's trunk, head and right leg are contained within the interspace, but do not run in its direction, they run across it in a zig-zag line, from right foot to knee, from knee to left hip, from left hip to right shoulder and from shoulder to head.

H-D = from the point of the Asura's left foot to the rim of his shield. In this interspace the sword, the back of the helmet and the left forearm are following its direction.

The trend along the diameter B′-B signifies a forward movement for Narasiṁha, but a receding movement for the Asura. The complementary diameter H-H′ on the contrary directs the up- and forward movement of the Asura.

H′-H = marks the backward tilt of Narasiṁha's head. It touches his right knee, the Asura's right heel and the point of his left foot.
G-A = all along the backline of the Asura's body, through the two hands of Viṣṇu grasping the Asura and up to the raised śaṅkha. The Asura' body, from his left leg to his right shoulder, is channelled between this line and the diameter, stemmed against Narasiṁha's assault.

The converging movements of the two figures are encompassed within the triangle C′-A-G. But while Nārasiṁha's movement is carried in one sweep up to the top of the panel, to the hand holding the conch, the Asura's movement only reaches the horizontal F′-D, and from there is deflected backwards, with the right arm reversed on his chest. It is Viṣṇu's head and mukuṭa that continue this trend in the upper part of this interspace.

A′-G′ = from the lotus-pedestal to the right side bracket along Viṣṇu's raised right hand. Only Viṣṇu's right foot and the back of his mukuṭa fall into line, all other forms stand across this interspace.
B′-F′ = from the ground before Viṣṇu's left foot up to the hand and the shaft of the paraśu.

Against the upright triangle including the two figures stands an inverted triangle with apex at A′ and sides ending at G′ and C. It rises from the lotus-pedestal and holds the interlocked legs in its point and the expanding movements of the upper bodies within its sides, from Narasiṁha's raised hand to the Asura's mukuṭa.

There is also a cross-movement, set on the diameter D′-D and its parallels which largely governs the movements of the arms.

D′-D = runs across Viṣṇu's thighs and the Asura's waist, then determines the movement of his arm raised with the shield.
E′-C = along Viṣṇu's right and left upper arms, the shoulder and mukuṭa of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Viṣṇu's arm lying on it. This line marks the deflection of the Asura's head. The whole upper part of his body with head, arm and shield is compressed within this space-division, while Viṣṇu's body stands across and only the drapery on his hip follows its trend.

F′-B = runs at right angles across Narasiṁha's head and shows the ascent of movement from his right to his left arms.
G′-A = the ascent from his raised hand to his mukuṭa.

The same line E′-C, which marks the recoiling movement of the Asura, marks the forward movement of Narasiṁha's arms. It goes through from the hand holding the paraśu on the right side to the hand on the Asura's head on the left. This line which has a negative connotation for the Asura has a forcefully positive connotation for Narasiṁha. In the lower part of the panel the contending forces are almost equivalent, but in the upper half this line decides which of them will prevail over the other. The Asura is kept strictly below this line, while the head and arms of Narasiṁha are raised triumphantly above it. In these arms there is an upward progression from the hand on the hip to the arm with the paraśu, the arm with the cakra, and the hand raised to strike; then to Viṣṇu's head and the hand raised with the conch, and finally to the arms that swoop down on Hiraṇyakaśipu. These arms and the head form a semicircle, in which the development of his action is summed up in a sequence, from beginning to fulfilment.

C′-E = from Narasiṁha's left ankle to the ankles of both interlocked legs, and from the points of Narasiṁha's scarves to the bow on the Asura's hip-drapery, connecting kindred forms in an upward sequence. The Asura's forward stretched thigh is lying in this direction, but downwards.

The complementary movements along F′-F and its parallels are not so much balancing but enforcing the previous movement, as far as Narasiṁha is concerned.

F′-F = runs from Narasiṁha's hand with the paraśu along his right thigh to the groin of the Asura.
G′-E = from the wrist of Narasiṁha's raised hand to his neck, and across his shoulders to the root of the Asura's neck. Viṣṇu's forearm with the cakra and the Asura's forearm with the sword lie at both ends in the middle of the interspace.
H′-D = from the mukuṭa of Narasiṁha to the head of the Asura, and from the wrist of his hand raised with the śaṅkha to the wrist of the Asura's hand within the shield.

Kindred parts of the figures of Narasiṁha and the Asura are connected in a descending sequence, which expresses the sway that the former holds over the latter.

Further there is the parallel descent from Narasiṁha's uppermost right hand to his hand on the enemy's shoulder which indicates the direction of the blow.

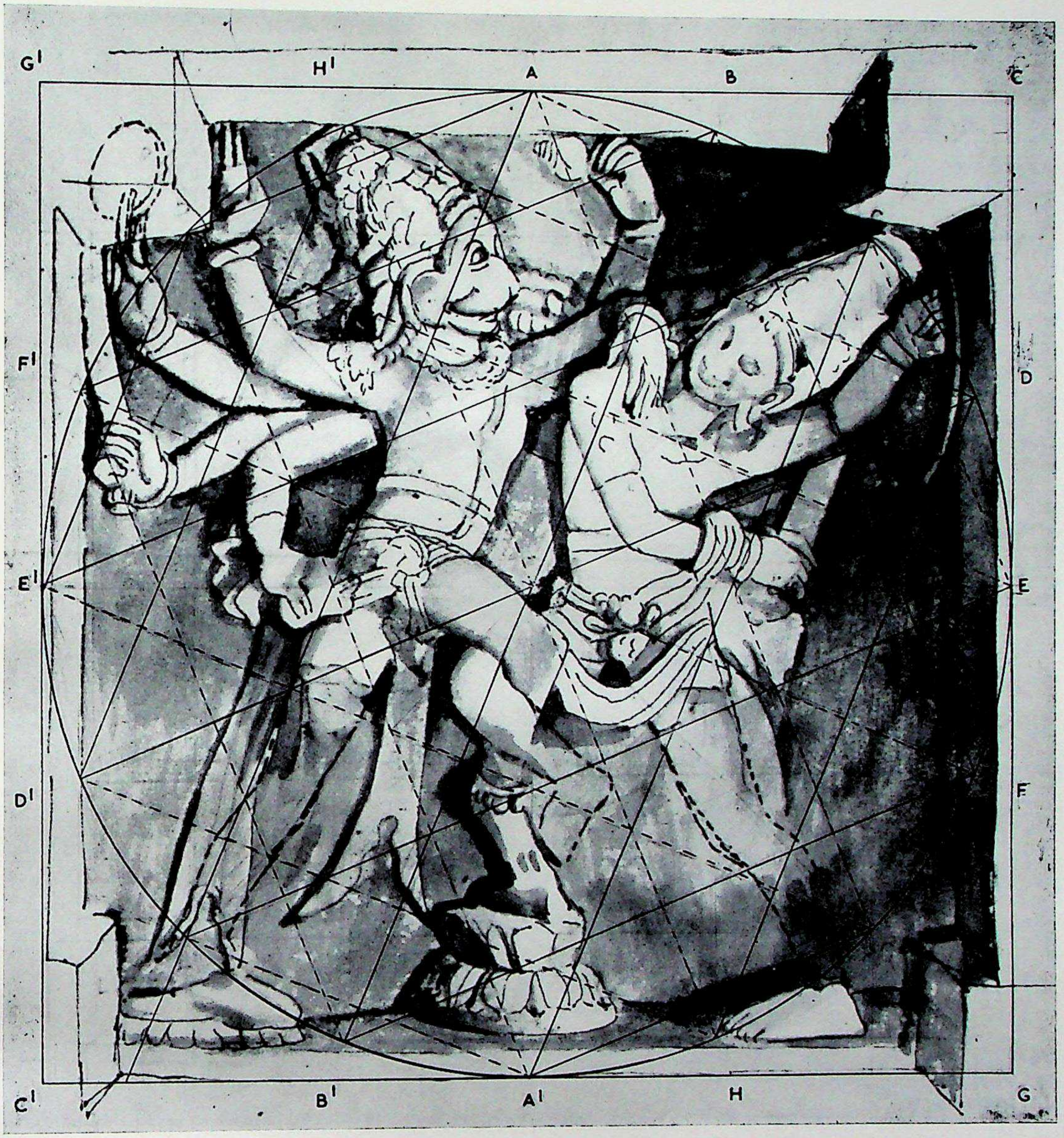
E′-G = runs across the interlocked feet, below and along the Asura's right shank.

Narasiṁha has a double grip over his enemy, hooking him both with his arms and with his leg. The lines of his arms and his leg are complementary and converge in the bend of his right arm placed on the hip. This triangle with apex at Narasiṁha's right elbow and opening towards Hiraṇyakaśipu holds Narasiṁha's outflowing energy between its two sides. It is directed upwards through the arms and downwards through the thigh to seize and to crush as between two huge jaws the whole figure of Hiraṇyakaśipu.

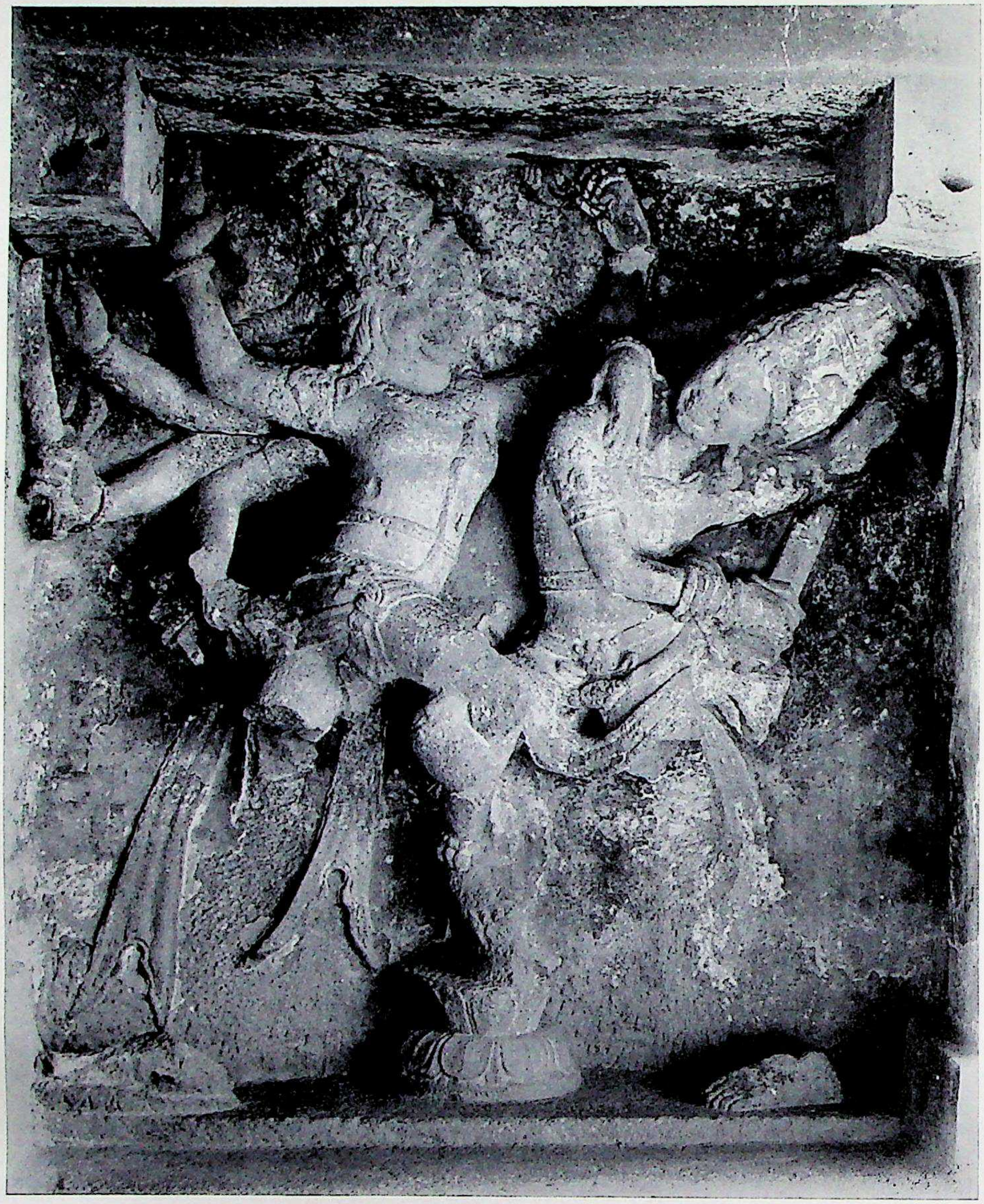
Two intersecting squares are formed by the outer chords of these four relevant space-directions. One is H′-D-H-D′ in the slant of Narasiṁha's body, and the other F′-B-F-B′ is in the slant of the Asura's body, and together they form a synthesis of all the antagonistic forces that run across one another in this composition.

INTEGRATION

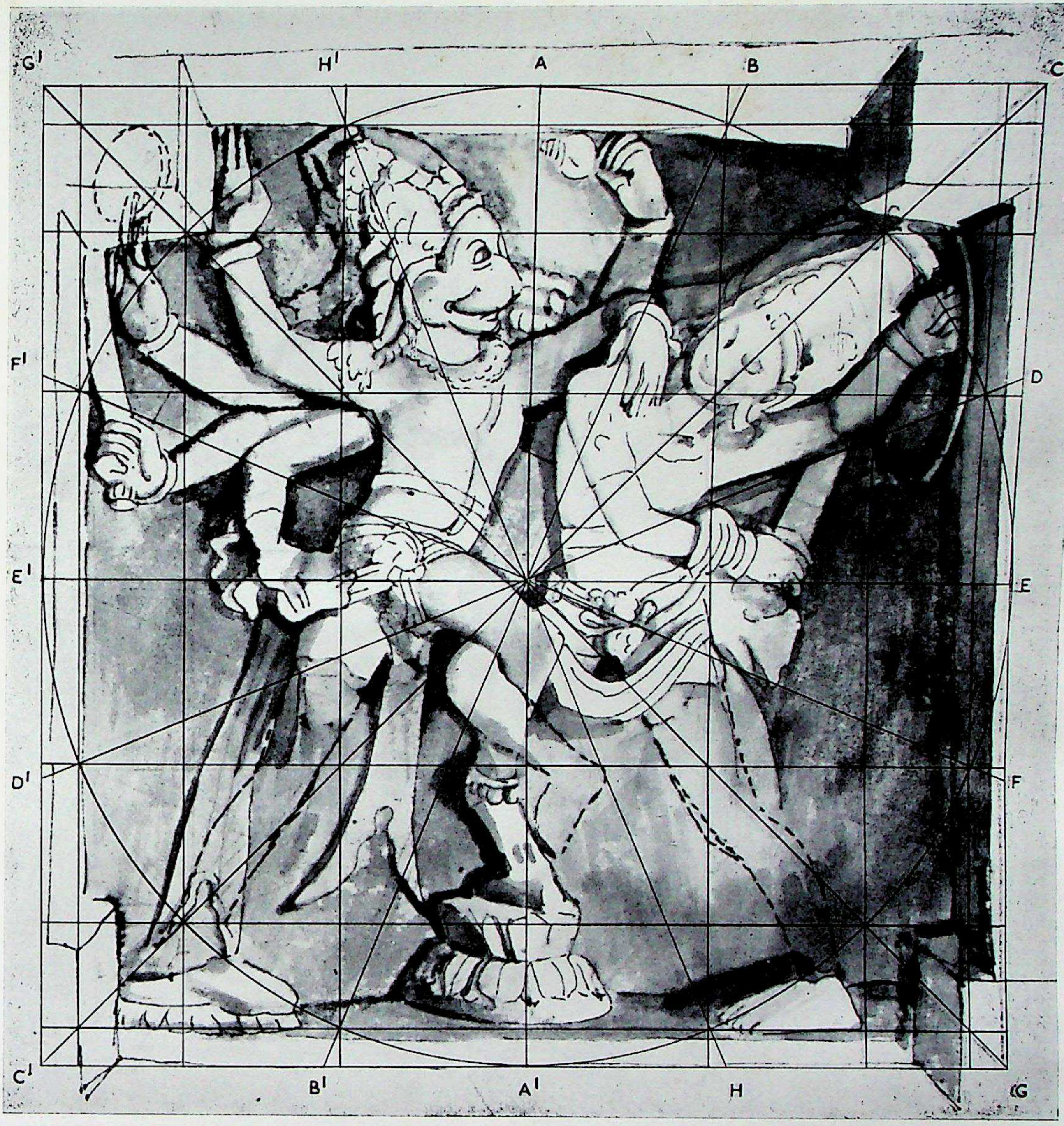
A fierce clash between two opposing forces is brought into a simple but eloquent formula: From both lower corners of the panel the bodies of the contending enemies are rising towards one another in converging oblique lines. In the middle of these the fight is engaged through the interlocked knees. Further up the slant of their bodies reaches the point where they should crash into one another, and here the test of strength is decided. One movement is carried victoriously across the middle line dividing the two figures, while the other is broken by this thrust and has to recoil upon itself at right angles. From here on the movements of the two figures are no longer opposed but run parallel, the one carried away by the impact of the other. The resistence of the weaker contendent, however, is not yet broken. It reasserts itself in the raised sword, arm and shield, but it is clearly on the defensive. Hiraṇyakaśipu's body, from his left foot to his left shoulder and hand is caving in, which shows that his energy is flagging, and the raised sword, closing the open gap, is a scanty support. On the other side the arms of Narasiṁha, fanning out in a circle, appear loaded with unspent energy. His arm stemmed on the hip is pushing forward, whereas the left arm of the Asura, bending back with the sword, drags his body along with it. While in the lower half of the panel the antagonistic forces appear symmetrical and almost equivalent, and in the interlocked legs the test of strength is engaged, but as yet undecided, in the upper half of the panel the movement begins to flow


G¹
H¹
A
B
C
F¹
D
E¹
E
D¹
F
C¹
B¹
A¹
H
G

b. TIME DIVISION



NARASIṀHA AVATĀRA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV


G1
H1
A
B
C
F1
D
E1
E
D1
F
C1
B1
A1
H
G

a. SPACE DIVISION

UP State Museum, Lucknow

from right to left, actively and victoriously advancing from the side of Narasiṁha and breaking in on the side of the Asura. The first is lying on the chord E′-C and the latter on the diameter D′-D, both running parallel, one above the other.

The essence of the story is condensed into a clear and simple formula, from which it derives its eloquence and significance. The effectiveness of a representation depends much more on the basic composition than on gestures and facial expressions of the single figures. These become valid and convincing only in so far as they are supported by a significant lay-out. Their power of expression rests on the symbolic substratum, the meaning of which they are to incorporate and to make explicit. Apart from it they remain irrelevant and empty. When both coincide in space and time, the highest degree of effectiveness is achieved.

CHAPTER TWO

MAHĀLAKṢMĪ

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV, 8TH CENT.

PLATE IV

Mahālakṣmī, the Mother-Goddess is seated on her Lotus-throne, the Earth-maṇḍala, which is floating on the Milk-ocean from where she has emerged. Her left leg is resting on the seat, while the foot of the right is on the ground. Her right hand (damaged) may have been holding a lotus, her constant attribute; the left, which is completely broken, is directed downwards and may have been resting on her knee or holding a bilva fruit. On each side of her stands a four-armed Deva, holding a water-pot in his hands. One of them is accompanied by a dwarf. Above the Devī's head, two cloud-elephants raise their jars to sprinkle fertilizing water over her. In the corners above the Devas, two more elephants raise their trunks in salutation. In the space between the head of the Devī and those of the Devas, two Gaṇas are flying joyfully. The Milk-ocean is represented by a crowded pattern of lotus-leaves and flowers, amongst which Nāgas and birds disport themselves.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE IVa

The panel is an upright rectangle. The directing circle is based on the height of the panel, measured between the two projecting brackets above the Devī, and is divided by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = falls through the central axis of the Devī's figure and through the vertical axis of the small Nāga in the centre of the Milk-ocean.

B-H and H′-B′ = down along the ears of the first elephants, along the back of the Gaṇas and the front of the two Devas by the side of the Devī's throne to the Milk-ocean, where they pass across the waterpots held by the two outer Nāgas.

By these two lines the panel is cut into three divisions, one broad central and two narrow lateral divisions. The central part holds the entire figure of the Devī with her throne, the Gaṇas and the elephants pouring water, as well as the middle of the Milk-ocean with the central group of Nāgas. The side-portions hold the two Devas, the second elephants and the lateral groups of Nāgas in the Milk-ocean.

C-G and G′-C′ = mark the outer limits of the panel.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = through the hips of the Devī, along the line of her thighs out to the hands of the Devas which are resting on their hips.

Madhya-bindu = exactly on the navel of the Devī.

D′-F = marks the dividing line between Lakṣmī and the Milk-ocean.

C′-G = runs through the hips of all three groups of Nāgas in the Milk-ocean.

B′-H = marks the lower limit of the Milk-ocean.

F′-D = above the centre marks the shoulder-line of the two Devatās and the upper limit of their waterpots.

G′-C = runs above the heads of the Devatās and of the Gaṇas, dividing the middle panel from the elephants above. The interspace holds the heads of the Devī, of her two attendant Devas and the flying Gaṇas.

Between G′-C and D′-F lies the horizontal middlespace which holds the three main figures from their feet to their crowns.

H′-B = passes above the heads of the elephants and along the lower line of the brackets. The interspace holds the entire row of elephants' heads and water-pots in cloudlike rounded shapes.

Here ends the panel proper. But the projecting brackets above filled with small figures in relief are included in the compositional scheme, since they provide a significant counterpart to the horizontal extension of the Waters that fill the lowest part of the panel.

Between the two horizontal extensions of the Milk-ocean and of the clouds, the three main figures rise in a gentle slant. The transition between horizontal extension and ascension is provided by the figure of the Devī, which is inscribed in a pyramidal form, rising in successive narrowing layers from her lotus throne to her legs and hips, then to her shoulders and culminating in her head. The broad base of the throne is assimilated to the horizontal extension of the Waters, while her rounded headdress is assimilated to the roundish cloud-jars above her head. And while her head is crowned by an open space between the brackets, the two Devas, who stand like pillars by her side are crowned by the two projecting brackets, as if they were their supports. Thus the whole panel shows a very pronounced architectural structure.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE IVb

In a static composition like the one shown here, movements are more internal than external, that means they are restrained and never carry any part of a figure beyond the limits assigned to it by space-division. Therefore the oblique diameters are here as much a factor of space-division as of movement. Except in the comparatively insignificant figures of the Gaṇas and of the Nāgas amongst the lotus foliage, there is no lively movement anywhere. Even these figures are kept within an exactly defined field of action.

The three main figures stand in symmetrical equipoise, the central figure of Mahālakṣmī facing outwards, and the two Devatās slightly turned towards her. A mild flow is brought into the static order by the obliques.

Essential diameters: B-B′ and H′-H, besides the horizontal

B-B′ = from the ear of the left elephant down to the navel of the Devī and along the line of her foot to the lotus-pond below.
H′-H = from the jaw of the right elephant through the navel of the Devī down to the lotus-pond.

These two diameters are complementary and symmetrically equivalent. Taken together, they form two triangles of 45 degrees converging with their points at the navel of the Devī. The upper triangle, opening upwards contains the head of the Devī along the line of her broad earrings, and the two central elephants along the line of their ears. The lower triangle, opening downwards, encloses the central Nāga-group in the Lotus-pond, with the flowers and leaves spreading below it, following also there a compositional division.

A-C′ and A-G = both running from the centre top of the panel along the front of the elephants, of the Gaṇas and of the Devatās to the outer ends of the Milk-ocean.

These two lines enclose the figure of the Devī in a triangle of shade and thus set her apart from all other forms. Her shape, equally triangular from the broad base of the lotus throne to the top of her crown is brought into full relief, like a cameo, by the shade of this hollow space. This space is encased into a frame formed by the figures of the Devas with their water-pots, of the Gaṇas and the central elephants, all running along its sides. Their slants are converging above the Devī's head into the lifted jars held by the elephants.

B-F and H′-D′ = descend from the raised trunks of the second elephants through the heads and the outer arms of the Devas. In the interspace a broken line of shade runs parallel to the previous one, from the back of the first elephants to the back of the Gaṇas and of the Devas, which gives minor accents to this slant.

There is a complementary movement in the opposite direction:

A′-G′ = runs upwards from the lower end of the madhyasūtra, through the backward slant of the right Deva's body. The Devī's lowered shin runs in this sense, and also her raised arm.
A′-C = from the same point, touching the Devī's left knee, through the backward slant of the left side Deva's body.

These two lines form an inverted triangle and from its vertex A' emerges the central group of Nāga and Nāgī in the Milk-Ocean.

B′-F′ and H-D = mark the backward slant of the two outer Nāga figures in the Milk-ocean.

The two central intersecting triangles A-C′-G and A′-G′-C form in their middle a parallelogram, into which the Devī, considered apart from her lotus seat, is inscribed. Her figure tapers upwards and downwards from the middle line. The two Devatās are involved in these two complementary directions in an opposite sense, by following, in the angle formed by their legs and the upper of parts their bodies the prolongations up and down of the sides of the parallelogram. In front, at the bend of their hips they touch the outer angles of the parallelogram, while behind, their figures end in the vertical lines of their arms resting on their hips.

A minor function devolves on the upper and lower parallels of the diameters D′-D and F-F′, which do not mark the longitudinal extension of any form, but serve as connecting lines between corresponding forms on the one and the other side of the panel. For instance:

E′-C = runs up along the forearm of the right side Deva to the arm of the left side Gaṇa and the headdress of the Deva behind him.
F′-B = from the headdress of the right side Deva to the skull of the first and the raised trunk of the second elephant on the other side. The movement of the Gaṇa on the right side lies between and in the direction of these lines, and so do the heads of both elephants.
E-G′ and D-H′ = run up from the other side in opposite directions and have almost the same connotations.

These lines, crossing one another on the face of Lakṣmī or above her head show the convergence of all outer figures towards the Devī. Along these lines everything is turned and directed towards her. The parallels below the centre have a function only in the composition of the line-pattern in the Milk-ocean.

E′-G and E-C′ = cross above the central Nāga, they descend below the shoulders of the outer Nāgas and follow the forward and upward slant of their forearms holding the water-jars.

D′-H and F-B′ = descend along the heads of the outermost Nāga figures, through shoulders and hands of their companions, from the outer Nāgas to the centre, where they cross just below the Nāga on the madhya-sūtra. This Nāga is thus enclosed exactly between the crossings of the upper and the lower parallels.

On closer examination it will be noted, that not only the Nāgas, but the entire intricate pattern of leaves, flowers and animals is in a subtle, almost imperceptible way governed by these lines and reveals a distinctive balance and symmetry.

The diagonal diameters are of minor importance. In the upper half of the composition they limit and direct the inner upper arms of the two Devatās and divide them from the Gaṇas.

Integration

The panel is composed in three horizontal layers, the region of the primordial Waters below, the region of the Earth in the middle (Lakṣmī is seated on the Earth-lotus), and the region of the sky above. The first is the undifferentiated Chaos pregnant with the germs of yet unborn life, the second is the world of fully evolved manifested forms, and the third represents the descent of the fertilizing power that causes Earth to bear fruit.

Above all these, in the brackets carved with Śārdūlas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and Apsarasas, a world of heavenly beings crowns and protects the display of manifested Life.

The Earth-region is the largest and is prominently displayed in the middle space of the panel. While both Water and Sky spread out horizontally, the Earth-region with the Devī and her attendants has an ascending tendency. The Devī is rising from the Waters, the primordial source of all Life, as the Mother-Goddess, the Earth-Goddess, the Goddess of growth and fertility. She is the Lotus and she is the Earth, ground and support of all existence [1].

The region of the Waters is second in size and importance. It is spread out on a flat surface in a crowded pattern of involved interlacing forms. The undifferentiated state of the primordial substance, replete with unborn potentialities, is represented by a texture of bewildering intricacy, which however, on closer analysis, resolves itself into a design of subtle balance and symmetry. In traditional sacred art, ignorant of naturalistic devices, but always guided by a superior form-conciousness, even the undifferentiated chaos could not possibly be depicted by a jumble of abstract lines. It had to be captured into a pattern and to be moulded into shape. Here the conception of the as yet unborn, virtual potentialities of the life-substance is ingeniously translated into the ideological analogy of a texture of innumerable different entities interwoven and assimilated to each other. The water-pots and the tortoise resemble lotus-leaves, the Nāgas resemble water-plants, the birds resemble flowers, and all together produce an undulating pattern of half-developed curly shapes resembling water. All these interwoven forms look as if they were enfolded in the womb of Time, with the potentiality of shaping themselves into anything that creative imagination would wish them to become. The shallow carving and the flat modelling complete the impression of something unfinished, still in the making.

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[1] For further elucidation on the symbolism of Lakṣmī and the Lotus, see A. K. Coomaraswamy's Buddhist Iconography, p. 17 and ff. and "Early Indian Iconography" in Eastern Art, a Quartely, Vol. I. No. 3. Jan. 1929.

In striking contrast with the flat and involved forms of the Nether Waters, the region of the Earth is built up in a clear and simple structure, and is roundly carved in deep relief. This is the world of full individuation, of completely developed entities. The passage from the Uncreated to the Created could not be expressed more directly and more impressively than by this simple juxtaposition of two entirely different form-contexts. Mahālakṣmī, fully and vigorously modelled, occupies the central position in the panel; the central position she occupies in the Universe as the Mother and origin of all Creation. Her rounded form is vividly brought out by the shadowy recess in which she is set as in a sanctuary to contain her glory.

The headdresses of Mahālaksmī and of the Devatās merge smoothly into the region of the clouds, and these again lead up to the brackets, where Śārdūlas, Gandharvas and Apsarasas are disporting themselves. This region, at the other end of the cycle of evolution, where all beings merge again into their divine origin, is similarly characterized by a loss of individuation. It is depicted by analogy to primeval indifferentiation, in a relief with flat and involved patterns. These two horizontal rectangles on either side are a formal counterpart to the horizontal expanse of the waters below, as they crown and complete the rigorous architectural build-up of the panel.

The hieratic attitude and composure of the main figures is curiously removed from conveying any sense of cold solemnity. A feeling of warm, pulsating life permeates from inside the rich expanding forms of the Devī, the devotional attitudes of the Devatās and the teeming crowded patterns in the Milk-ocean and in the heavenly regions. This pervasive blossoming of the forms culminates in an array of spherical shapes that punctuate the composition from top to bottom. These are the Devī's round face, her two breasts, the two jars held by the attendants, the two jars raised high by the elephants, and finally the jars amongst the lotus-leaves in the Milk-ocean. The roundness of the breasts and of the jars are assimilated to one another in a symbolical analogy of their significance. Both are the sources of life-giving fluids, of milk and water, and their symmetrical distribution all over the panel undoubtedly embodies the conception of Creation and Fertility.

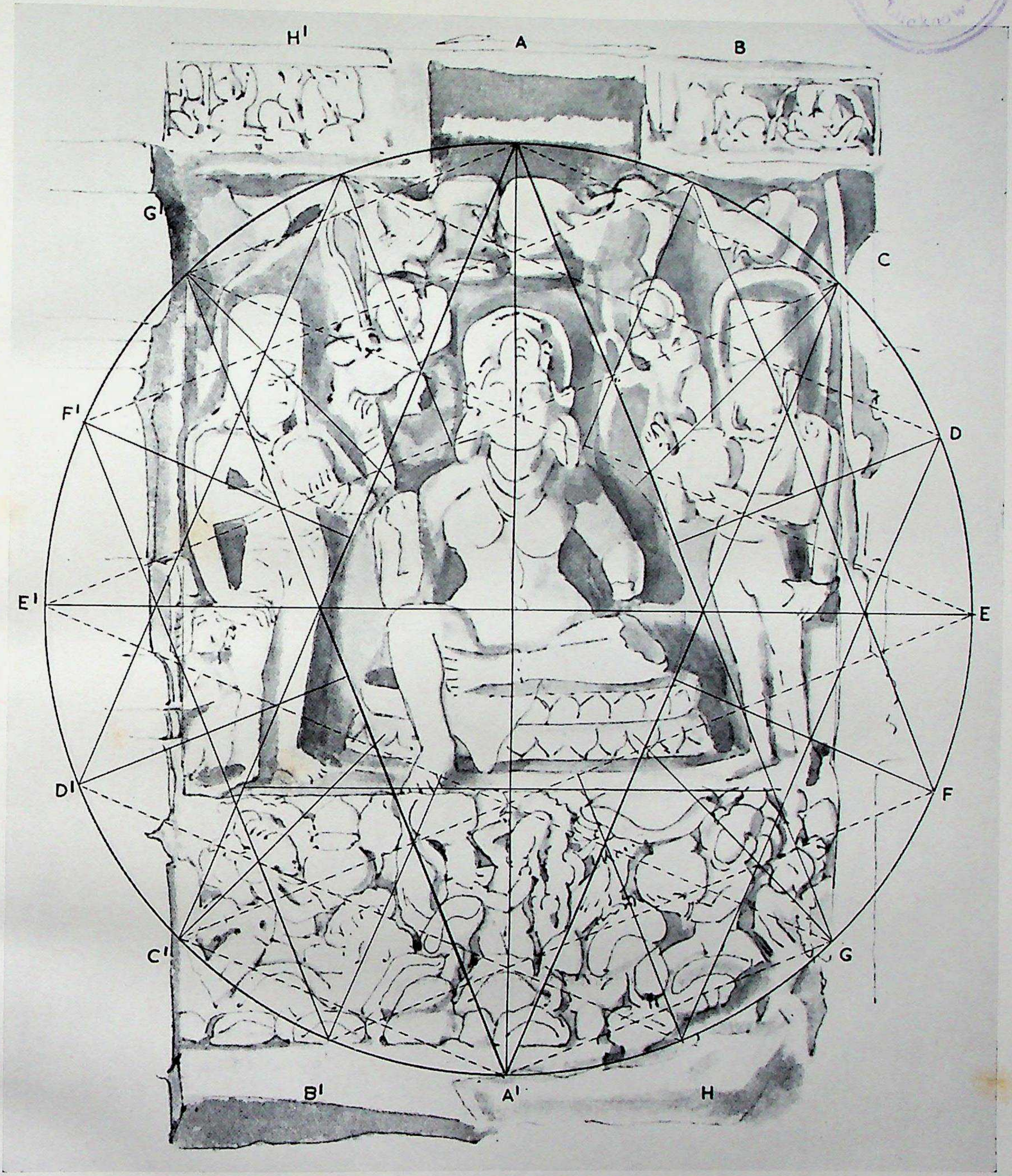
It is significant in this respect that the madhyabindu of the composition corresponds with Lakṣmī's navel, that is with her Maṇipūra cakra, which is the seat of Fire and the vital centre of all creative forces.

"The Lotus-lady is intrinsic Power, the constant giver of increase".

Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, 1.8.23, Transl. by Coomaraswamy in Buddhist Iconography, Note, p. 71.

State Museum Library Lucknow

PLATE IV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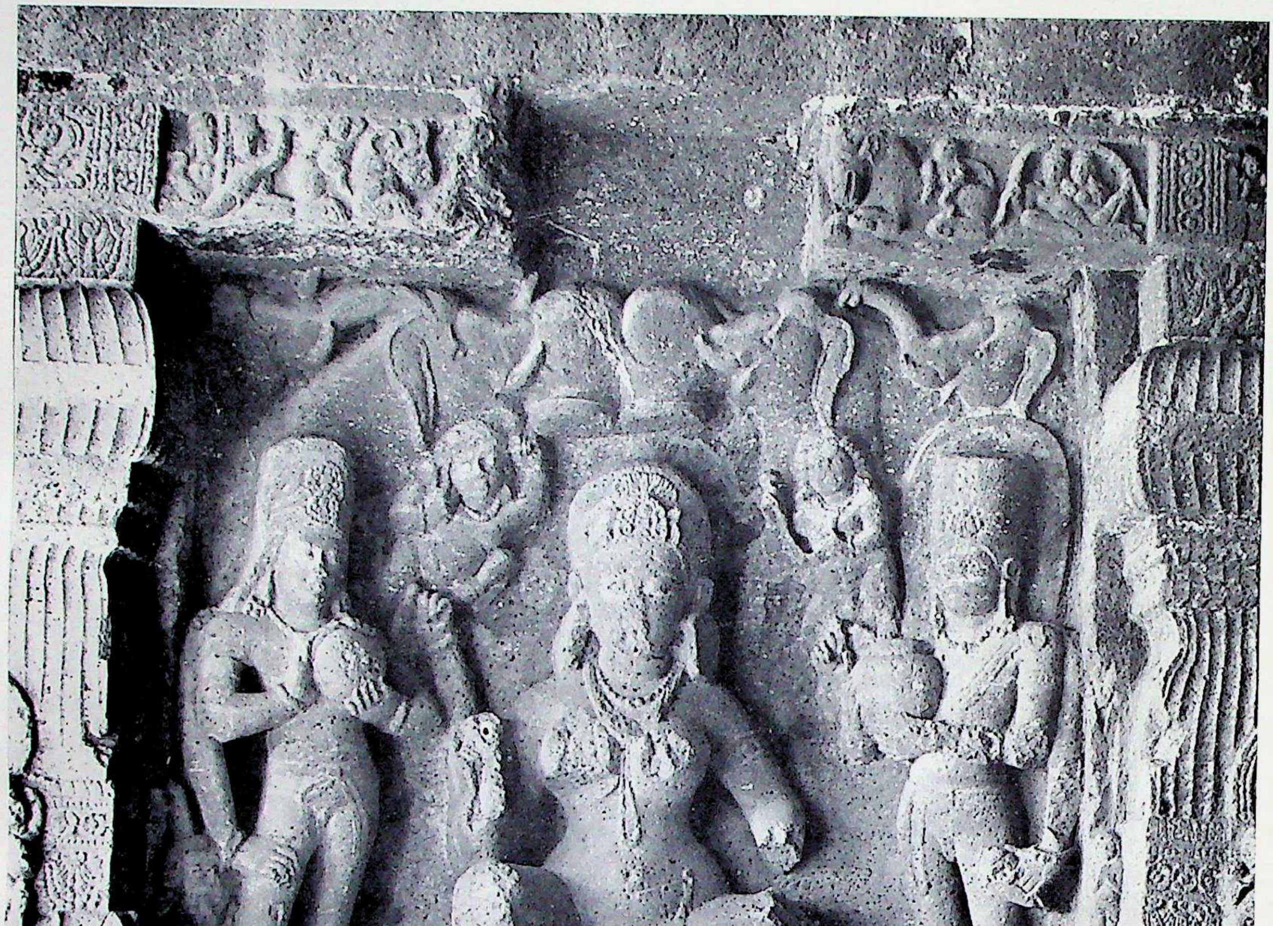
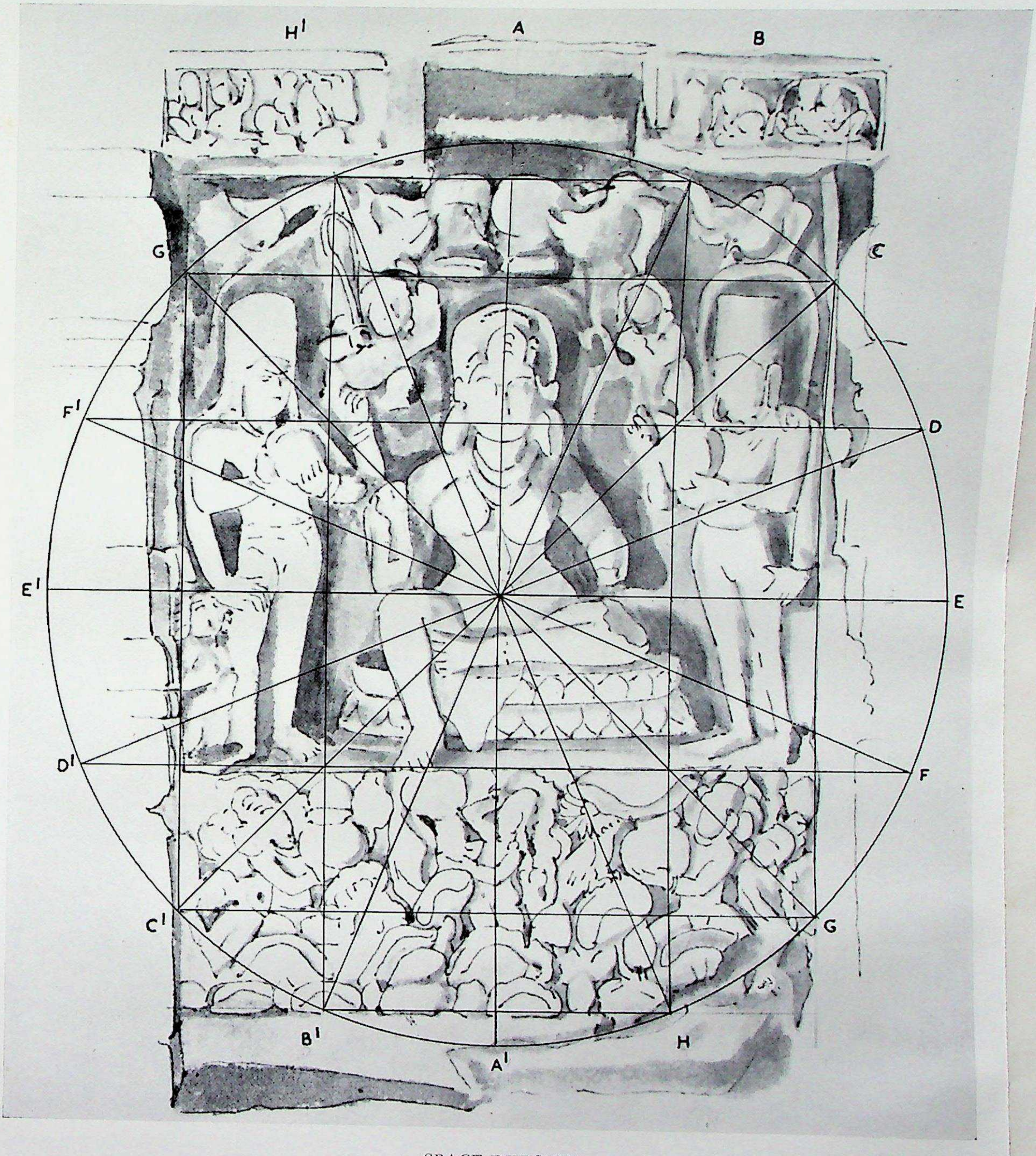
b. TIME DIVISION



MAHĀLAKṢMĪ
ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER THREE

MAHĀLAKṢMĪ

ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE, 9TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE V

As in the panel in Cave XIV, Mahālakṣmī is seated on her lotus-throne, floating on the Milk-ocean, with the difference, however, that she is in yogic āsana, with both legs folded on the throne. Her arms are no longer intact, but traces on the stone indicate that they were bent up at the elbows towards the breasts. The hands may have been holding two lotus-flowers as we find them in the Lakṣmī-panel at the entrance of the Lankā temple in Elūrā, an obviously later version of this composition. She is flanked by four cloud-elephants, who are seen with their entire bodies, standing in pairs one above the other on different levels. The upper ones raise their jars above the head of the Devī, and turning them over, pour the heavenly waters over her. The smaller ones playfully roll their jars about with their feet and trunks. Above the two lifted water-jars in the centre of an arch of flying Gandharvas and Apsarasas an umbrella, the emblem of Royalty, crowns Lakṣmī's figure.

SPACE-DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE Va

The composition is symmetrically arrayed around the central figure of the Devī, and therefore the madhyasūtra should, by form-criteria, coincide with the axis of Lakṣmī's body, not only, but also with the mathematical centre of the composition. There is, however, an anomaly in this panel, in so far as the two halves right and left of the formal centre are not of equal width, and if the panel were divided by the measuring rod, the madhyasūtra would fall beside the formal centre. That such a discrepancy is rather accidental than intentional is evidenced by the otherwise perfectly symmetrical array of all figures, and also by the fact that the two upper elephants are of equal length from head to tail. The inequality of the two sides also leaves an empty space behind the elephant on the left side, which, having had to be filled, may account for the somewhat disproportionate size of the Gandharva placed in that gap. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the madhya-sūtra has to be based on the formal centre and not on outer measurements. The directing circle is co-extensive with the height of the panel and is divided by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the umbrella, between the two jars and the centre of the Devī's body.

H′-B′ = on the right side, descends between Gandharva and Apsarā, through the upper elephant from head to foot and along the front of the lower elephant.
B-H = on the left side, has the same connotations.

These two lines enclose a clear vertical middle-space which reaches out to the front-lines of the smaller elephants. In its centre is the vertical array of Lakṣmī on her throne, the water-jars and the umbrella above her head. Along the sides of her lotus-seat, her outspread knees and the square at the back of her throne Lakṣmī is cut away and isolated from her surroundings by two deep vertical slits. The two smaller elephants are kept strictly outside this middle space, while the front of the big elephants and the two foremost of the upper flying figures push forward into it.

G′-C′ = almost reaches to the outer limit of the panel.
C-G = descends along the figure of the outermost Gandharva, the back of the big elephant and the hind leg of the small elephant.

The second vertical divisions right and left contain the compact mass of the small elephants with the square blocks behind them, the central portions of the big elephants and above them a Gandharva on the left and two Apsarasas on the right side. Due to the inequality in the width of the two sides, the right side ends just beyond the vertical G′-C′, while the left side reaches out near the third vertical D-F.

This last interspace holds the hind leg of the small elephant, the tail portion of the big one, and the standing figure of the Gandharva.

The vertical movement is dominant throughout the middle space, from the Devī's throne to the top of the umbrella. The Devī's erect body, her head and crown, the water-jars and the umbrella form a vertical sequence, a powerful axis supporting the whole composition. On both sides of the panel only smaller vertical form-elements respond to this ascending movement, such as the front-line of the small elephants, the soles of the bent feet and the chest-line of the big elephants. Also the outer Gandharva and Apsaras and the flying figures are more or less in the vertical.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = at the mathematical centre of the madhyasūtra, it passes just below Lakṣmī's shoulders, along the upper edge of the square at her back, on which the elephants place their feet.

Madhya-bindu = on the root of Lakṣmī's neck, at the Viśuddha-cakra.

D′-F = along the bellies of the small elephants and the shins of Lakṣmī dividing them from her lotus-seat.

F′-D = passes just above Lakṣmī's crown, along the jaws of the big elephants and through the waist of the big Gandharva.

These two horizontals exactly encompass Lakṣmī's figure from her folded legs to the top of her crown. Also the bulk of all four elephants' bodies is contained in this middle-space, leaving out the heads of the big and the legs of the small elephants.

G′-C = passes above the water-jars held up by the elephants, from the shoulders of the right side Apsaras through the waist-lines of the two flying couples and the brow of the big Gandharva on the left.

The interspace holds the heads of the big elephants with their trunks and water-jars, the bodies of the outermost Gandharva and Apsaras, and the bent legs of the flying couples. The upper parts of these figures lie in the uppermost division, their arms falling into line with the slightly curved rim of the umbrella.

The first horizontal division below the centre contains the lotus-throne, the legs of the small elephants and the upper portion of the Milk-ocean, while its lower part with horizontal rows of lotus-leaves fills the bottom of the panel. The line separating the throne of the Devī from the Milk-ocean, which appears very important in setting the proportions of the different strata of the composition, is not covered by any important chord in the compositional scheme, but lies in the middle of the space-division.

The broad horizontal expanse of the Milk-ocean at the base and the central vertical column built up by the body of the Devī, the water-jars and the umbrella, form a cruciform scaffolding across the height and the width of the panel, which sternly controls the inner structure.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE Vb

Essential diameters: D′-D, F-F′, B-B′, H′-H

D-D′ and F′-F = form the longitudinal axis of the small elephants' bodies slanting upwards, and cross the big elephants on the other side from their front feet to their backs.

E′-C and E-G′ = run through the length of the big elephants' bodies, and after crossing above the Devī's head they give the slant of the heads of the elephants on the opposite side.

F′-B and D-H′ = run above the backs of the elephants showing the upward and forward movement of the groups of Gandharvas and Apsarasas. On the left side their bent legs lie directly on this line.

G′-A and C-A = mark the movement of their raised arms.

Against the rigid frame-work of the horizontal-vertical division the most conspicuous movement is carried by the bulky shapes of the elephants and the two rows of heavenly beings, all ascending obliquely towards the central axis. The small elephants's backs undulate upwards towards the shoulders of the Devī. Their upward trend, however, is abruptly broken by the deep vertical slit, which separates them from the Devī, and so the whole disposition of Devī and small elephants comes to resemble a broken baroque pediment. The slants of the two big elephants' backs converge towards and culminate in the two upraised waterjars. They form a second triangular, unbroken but indented pediment above the first one. The build-up, even in the movements, is strictly architectonic, and it is only in the individual shapes of Gandharvas and Apsarasas that some freer movement comes into the composition. But even here, the collective movement of their aggregate forms is rounded into an arch which, with the umbrella at the centre, crowns the entire composition. And so these groups do not break up, but rather complete the architectural structure, which is built up by five well-defined elements: a horizontal substratum (the Milk-ocean), a central column (Devī, water-jars and umbrella), a broken pediment with central elevation (Devī and two small elephants), a bigger indented pediment (big elephants with water-jars) and an arch (Gandharvas), the two latter ones supported by the central column. The ascending movements of the big elephants from either side are prolonged in a descending movement of the elephant's head on the opposite side, and in this counterplay of complementary movements, a flowing, well-balanced rhythm is created.

This upward movement is restrained and articulated by the oblique movement along the diameters H-H′ and B′-B and their parallels, which stand at right angles to the former.

H′-H and B-B′ = descend from the centre of the first group of Gandharvas on either side along the cheeks of Lakṣmī, and after crossing at her neck run along her hips into the Milk-ocean.

A′-G′ and A′-C = from the centre bottom of the panel up through the Devī's knees to the edges of the pedestals of the big elephants, then across their bodies along the line of their belts. Together they form an inverted triangle.

Between B-B′ and C-A′, between H′-H and G′-A′ the big elephants' front legs and ears are slanting down towards the Devi's shoulder and the back of her throne.

Between G′-A′ and F′-B′ and between C-A′ and D-H the front of the small elephants and the big elephants' hind legs are in the same direction. The complementary parallels mark a series of upright triangles that intersect the previous ones.

A-C′ and A-G = run down from the top of the umbrella through the front of the big elephants and the heads and shoulders of the small ones.

H′-D′ and B-F = down along the slants of the middle Gandharva on the left and the middle Apsaras on the right side and along the hind legs of the big elephants.

The figure of the Devī is inscribed into a smaller upright triangle with sides parallel to these diameters. This triangle has its vertex at the crossing point of E′-C and G′-E, and its base on the horizontal of the Milk-ocean, between the points where the verticals H-B and B′-H′ meet its line. The sides of this triangle exactly follow the slant of the Devī's arms. When extended across the vertex of the triangle to the top of the panel, they produce an inverted triangle that exactly circumscribes the umbrella and ends in the raised forearms of the flying figures on either side of the umbrella.

The triangle containing the Devī is set into a rectangle of approximately the same height and width. It is limited above by the horizontal of the big elephants' jaws, laterally by the sides of the pedestals, and below by the line of the Milk-ocean. This rectangle forms a clear space around the Devī, but for the upper elephants' frontlegs that step into it. (See Space-Division)

The arms of the Devī and the legs of the elephants that step down behind her shoulders are not only analogous in shape and size, but correspond to one another also in their movements, since they run crosswise from the centre in complementary directions. At the point of their crossing they generate a vital nexus, which unites the Devī to the four elephants, and at the same time stems their bulky bodies away from her delicate frame.

INTEGRATION

In this panel the Milk-ocean, or Primordial Chaos is figured, not by an intricate pattern of analogous and illusive forms, but more simply, by an even and rather undifferentiated array of lotus leaves which, in their monotonous repetition, suggest the endless coming and going of ripples on the surface of water.

The figure of Lakṣmī, seated above the Waters, does not display the broad and luxuriant ease of the Lakṣmī in Cave XIV. She is hieratic and tense, her solemnity almost frozen into geometrical rigidity. She towers above the Milk-ocean in the form of a pillar, prolonged into the water-pots and the umbrella that supports the crowning arch.

She is as timeless as the Milk-ocean, from where she has emerged, and, if the Milk-ocean appears as the origin and substratum of the Universe, she figures as its axis and inner support, or as the Tree of Life, whose roots are in the Abyss and whose crown is in the Heavens.

The Devī is motionless, but all other figures are moving towards her. They do not form a relatively passive frame as in the previous image, but are actively drawn towards her, as if by a mysterious, magnetic force. Their movement rises in three parallel waves, one above the other, as a desultory beginning, a consummation and a crowning apotheosis. The small elephants make a beginning, but suddenly break it off by putting down their jars and turning their heads away. This breaking off is formally represented by the sharp vertical gap between these elephants and the Devī. The big elephants take up the movement with greater vigour and carry it to its fulfilment by swinging their jars high above the head of the Devī and pouring the heavenly waters over her. The Gandharvas on both sides float up into the air along the same trend, but their collective movement is arched into a kind of halo along the line of the directing circle. The curves of this arch are converging from both sides towards the pyramidal form of the umbrella, which crowns the central pillar and at the same time closes the arch like a coping-stone.

This dynamic drive of all surrounding form-elements makes the central figure of the Devī look even more severe and solemn. She not only is the immovable centre of convergence, but also the vital nucleus of the whole composition.

The function of nucleus is analogically expressed by the involved form-context about the Devī's chest. The lines of the big elephants' legs appear to pass under the Devī's shoulders to re-emerge in the roundness of her breasts, while her shoulders and arms look as if slung over them in a loop whose ends are pointing down towards the small elephants. The four ends of these interlacing loops form an oblique cross connecting the four corners of the empty rectangle around the Devī and building a nexus between the upper and the lower parts of the composition. This knot, lying at the centre of the panel, being slung around the madhya-bindu and fixed and consolidated around the pillar of the Devī's body, is of vital importance, because all other forms are harnessed to it.

While the front legs of the big elephants virtually reach down to the breasts of the Devī, their trunks have a complementary movement up towards the jars. There is correspondence between these two movements, just as there is correspondence, in form, size and position, between the breasts and the jars. Both being placed on the central pillar, they may be intended to emphasize its particular significance as the Tree of Life and its nourishing sap.

There is however another aspect in this unusually solemn and austere image of Mahālakṣmī, which deserves consideration. Her perfect yogic posture and her inner tension would appear to be expressions, not so much of the unfolding of Life on all planes as of an intense upward aspiration. She is not blossoming forth, as she is in the previous image, but rather seems to draw all forces into herself. Her forms are less opulent and look as if purified in the fire of Yoga. The madhya-bindu does not lie at the navel, the creative centre, but at the root of the neck, in the Viśuddhacakra, the cakra of speech, articulated sound and discriminative knowledge. This cakra is the gateway of the great Liberation for the pure. It is said that he who fixes his citta on this lotus becomes a Jñānin, he attains complete knowledge of the Ātman and Brahman, he becomes a great sage, eloquent and wise, enjoys constant peace of mind, sees all the three times, past, present and future. Lakṣmī sits, absorbed in herself, as if consciously intent on raising the forces of Life to higher and more spiritual levels. The elephants on both sides, with their forms ascending towards Lakṣmī and the central column incorporate in their slant the feeling of this upward aspiration. She may, therefore, be conceived here, not so much in her aspect as cosmic, creative power, but rather as the essence of Jñāna, as Jñāna-Śakti or Cit-Śakti.

"Mahāśakti Lakṣmī, in her supreme state is indistinguishable from the windless Atmosphere (Vāsudeva), existing only as it were in the form of 'darkness' and 'emptiness". (from Pañcaratra, quoted in Shakti and Shākta by Woodroffe, p. 278).

If this is the meaning of the image, the broad expanse of Water may stand, not so much for the primordial chaos, as for the flatness and dumbness of sāṁsāric existense, above which the spirit can rise only in the vertical aspiration attained by Yoga and Jñāna.

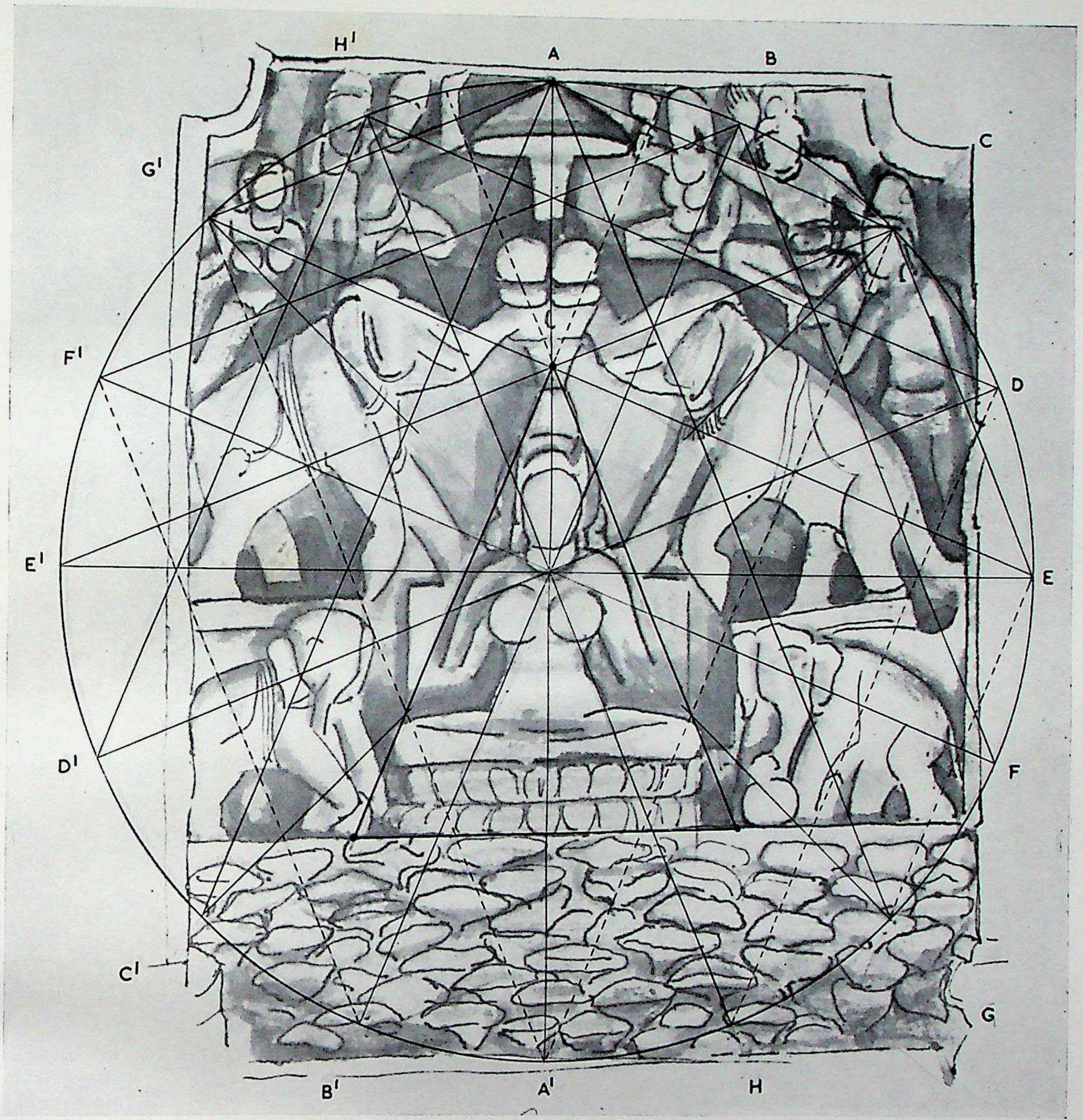
The Waters, which in the material universe represent the primordial substance from which all manifestation is born, in the Jīvātman represent the subconscious soul-substance, the dark depths which are the substratum of conscious life. In this image the lotus leaves are not only figured in an unarticulated sequence, but are all shaped like small funnels, whose ends seem to reach down into unknown depths.

It should be noted also that in the outlay of the Kailāsa Temple at Elūrā this image of Mahālakṣmī is placed exactly in line with the image of Śiva as Mahāyogin (Dakṣiṇāmūrti Śiva), the Supreme Yogin and Guru, and the embodiment of Jñāna. The image of Lakṣmī faces the visitor under the first porch, when entering the Temple, and the Mahāyogin under the second porch, exactly behind and facing the same way as Mahālakṣmī. This Temple, bearing the image of Dakṣiṇāmūrti on the face of the Śikhara, seems to be devoted entirely to the Jñāna aspect of Śiva.

In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa I.IX. Śakra (Indra) thus addresses Mahālakṣmī, after she emerged from the Milk-ocean:

"Thou art Siddhi, thou art Swadhā and Swāhā, thou art Sudhā (ambrosia), the purifier of the Universe; thou art evening, night and dawn; thou art power, intellect, faith. Thou art the Goddess of Letters (Sarasvatī). Thou, beautiful Goddess, art knowledge of devotion, great knowledge, mystic knowledge, and spiritual knowledge, which confers eternal liberation".

(Transl. by H. H. Wilson, p. 148)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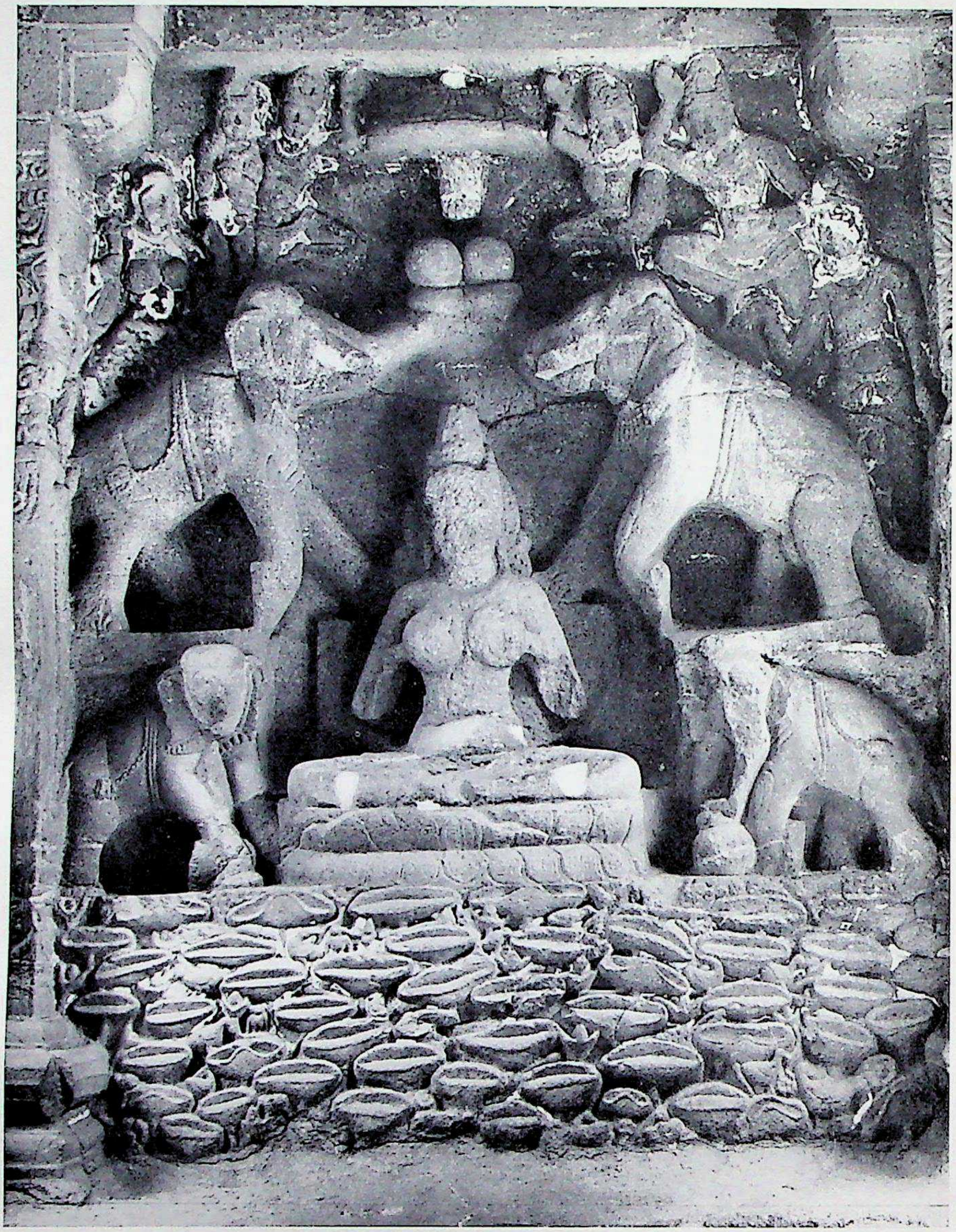
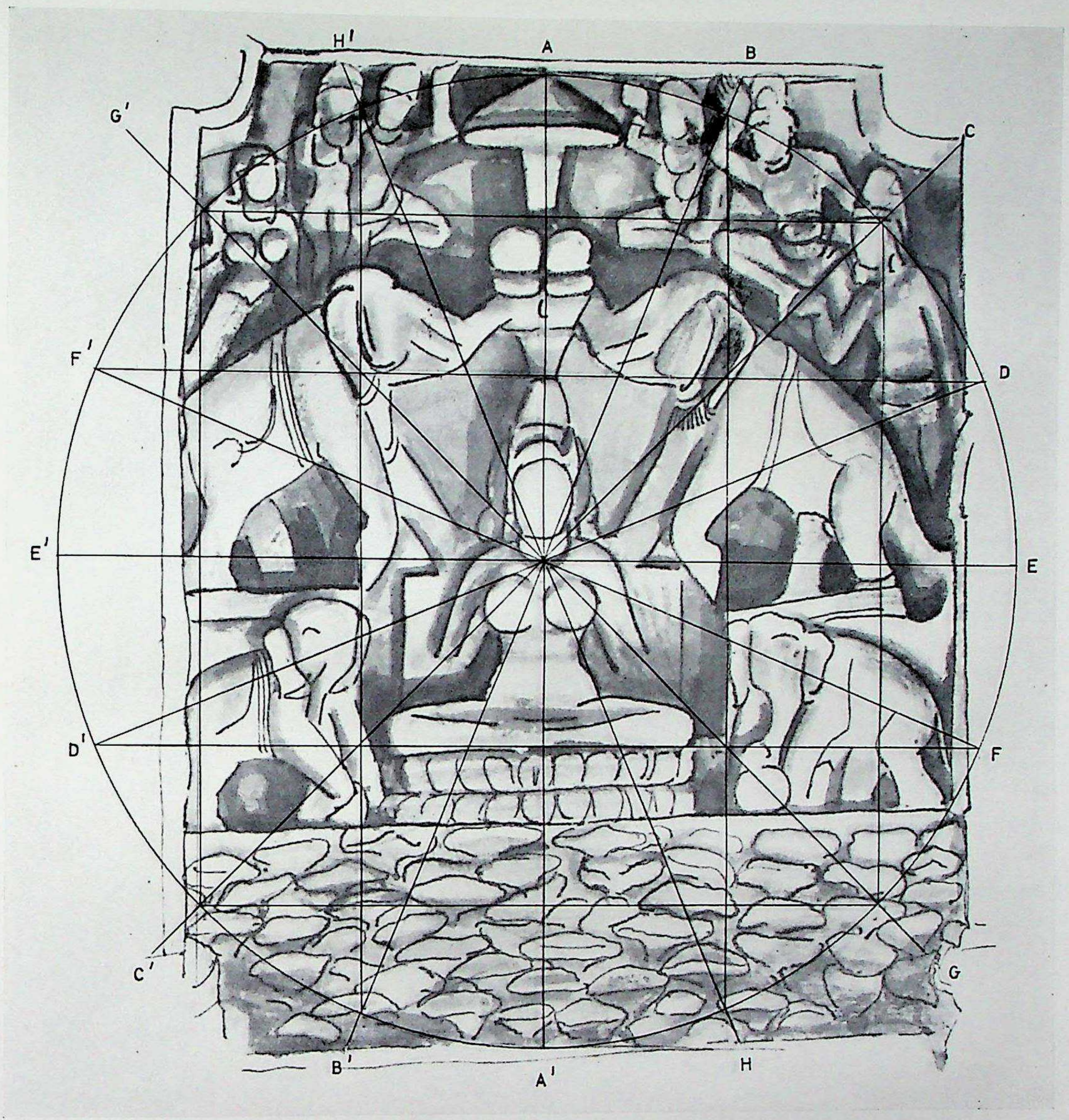


MAHĀLAKṢMĪ, ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSA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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER FOUR

MAHĀLAKṢMĪ

MAHĀBALIPURAM, VARĀHA CAVE, 7TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE VI

Mahālakṣmī is seated on a gigantic lotus-flower, which rises from the Milk-ocean between two upturned lotus-leaves. Seated on the inner closed petals of the flower, her feet are placed on the outer open petals as on a footstool. Her hands are raised as if holding a lotus-flower in each of them. Four Apsarasas, born from the ocean like Lakṣmī herself, are standing on either side with offerings in their hands. The heads of two big cloud-elephants occupy the uppermost part of the panel. One stands with his trunk hanging down, the other raises a water-jar above Lakṣmī's head to pour heavenly waters over her.

SPACE DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE VIa

The panel is a perfect square. The directing circle is touching its four sides, and is divided, as in the previous Lakṣmī images, by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the centre of Lakṣmī's body, through the middle of the raised jar and between the two lotus-leaves.

H′-B′ and B-H = through the heads of the elephants and through the front line of the two first Apsarasas. They contain between them the middle space, with Lakṣmī on her lotus-throne in the centre, the pots with offerings at her sides, the trunks of the elephants above and the two lotus-leaves below.

G′-C′ and C-G = along the roots of the elephants' ears and along the front-lines of the second Apsarasas. The interspaces contain the bodies of the first Apsarasas and the middle part of the elephants' heads above them.

F′-D′ and D-F = along the backs of the second Apsarasas. In the interspaces on either side are the bodies of the second Apsarasas, and on the left side the open ear-flap of the elephant.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = across Lakṣmī's waist, her elbows and the shoulder-line of all the Apsarasas. It is very well marked throughout the width of the panel.

Madhya-bindu = at Lakṣmī's navel (Maṇipūra cakra) as in the Lakṣmī relief in Elūrā (Cave XIV).

F′-D = runs across Lakṣmī's forehead and along the lower jaws of both elephants, marking the lower limits of their heads. The interspace contains the heads of all four Apsarasas and the body of Lakṣmī from waist to brow.

G′-C = runs through the heads of both elephants, lengthwise through the right one and broadwise across the left, in the middle along the mouth of the raised water-jar. The entire interspace between F′-D and the top of the panel is occupied by the heads of the elephants.

D′-F = passes through the groins of all four Apsarasas and above the ankles of Lakṣmī.

C′-G = passes below the knees of the Apsarasas. From D′-F to the bottom of the panel the entire space is occupied by the legs of the Apsarasas, the feet of Lakṣmī resting on the lotus-petals above the two big lotus-leaves.

If these horizontal interspaces are each subdivided into two equal halves, we come across some further relevant space-divisions. These lines touch off the following points:

Between G′-C and H′-B = the top of the elephants' ears and the line of the abacus in the projecting pilaster-capitals.

Between G′-C and F′-D = the top of Lakṣmī's mukuṭa, the upper edge of both elephants' ears and the horizontal tusk of the right elephant.

Between F′-D and madhya-prastha = the upper limits of Lakṣmī's hands and the dividing line between crown and heads of the Apsarasas.

Between madhya-prastha and D′-F = the upper edge of Lakṣmī's lotus-seat and the lower limit of the breasts of all four Apsarasas.

Between D′-F and C′-G = the lower line of the lotus-pedestal under Lakṣmī's feet, which is the base of her figure.

Lakṣmī occupies the exact middle of the panel, i.e. one and a half space-divisions above and below the madhya-prastha.

Also the vertical divisions, when subdivided, yield some quite interesting points: for instance, they give the exact demarcation of the width of Lakṣmī's figure, they mark the backline of the first Apsarasas and run as axes through the figures of the second Apsarasas. Thus the entire vertical-horizontal space division shows, into its minutest details, a rigid mathematical order.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE VIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and H-H′.

These two diameters and their parallel chords control the entire composition. They cross one another on the horizontal middleline at five points, the central point being at Lakṣmī's navel and the other four at the root of the Apsarasas' necks. They connect the upper and the lower parts of the panel in a regular net of complementary correspondences.

B-B′ = down along the head of the left elephant, through the body of Lakṣmī to the foot of the first Apsaras on the right side.
H′-H = across the right elephant's head to the foot of the first Apsaras on the left side.

From their crossing at Lakṣmī's navel these two lines open upwards and downwards into two opposite triangles of 45 degrees, along which Lakṣmī's body broadens out from her waistline up to her shoulders and down to her knees.

G′-A′ and C-A′ = their next parallels form an inverted triangle with vertex at the bottom centre. They run down between the ears and jaws of the two elephants and along the breast-line of the two first Apsarasas to converge in the cleft between the two lotus-leaves. In the interspace on the left the head of the elephant and the shin of Lakṣmī follow their direction, in the interspace to the right the elephant's jaw and the shin of Lakṣmī.
F′-B′ and D-H = run along the breast-lines of the two second Apsarasas and end at the feet of the first Apsarasas.
E′-C′ and E-G = touch the elbows of the second Apsarasas and run along the slant of their thighs to their feet.

The complementary direction opens from the triangle C′-A-G with vertex at the top centre.

A-C′ and A-G = run from the top of the water-jar down along the trunks, one raised and one lowered, of the two elephants and the faces of the two first Apsarasas to the feet of the second Apsarasas.
H′-D′ and B-F = run from the skulls of the elephants down along the forward slants of the second Apsarasas' heads to their elbows and hips. The heads of all Apsarasas are governed by these slants.

The two intersecting triangles C′-A-G and G′-A′-C, formed by the two first parallels on either side, contain at their centre a parallelogram in which the figure of Lakṣmī is inscribed. The elephants, the first two Apsarasas and the lotus leaves enclose this space. The two vessels held by the Apsarasas fill the side-corners of the parallelogram. The figure of Lakṣmī forms a smaller parallelogram encased in the bigger one. This parallelogram, which was found also in the configuration of the Lakṣmī at Elūra, Cave XIV, is more regular here, because both legs are hanging down, converging into a point.

In the prolongations of the two triangles forming the parallelogram two more triangles are opening upwards and downwards on either side. The upper ones hold the faces of the first Apsarasas and the heads of the elephants, and the lower ones the bodies of the same Apsarasas.

From the points of intersection of B-F and D-H on the left, and of B′-F′ and D′-H′ on the right side, two more opposite triangles open up and down, the upper holding skulls and ears of the elephants and the heads of the second Apsarasas, and the lower the bodies of the second Apsarasas. These triangles have all their vertex on the madhya-prastha.

On the lower horizontal D′-F there are equally two points, at the crossing of A-C′ and F′-B′ and of A-G and D-H, from where two bigger triangles open upwards. These contain on either side the heads of both the Apsarasas crowned by the big heads of the elephants.

The scheme of movements in this composition is summed up in the crossing of the complementary directions B-B′, H′-H and their parallels. The madhya-prastha is extremely vital, because it is the line where all essential directions cross and from where the movements of all figures change over into their complementaries. While in the figure of Lakṣmī all directions coalesce into a closed parallelogram of compact forms, in the other figures they open into linear, undulating movements. These figures follow alternately one direction and its complementary, as they pass from one horizontal space-division into another. The Apsarasas, in their profiles, form a kind of tribhanga. Upto the horizontal D′-F their legs are slanting forward, from there to the madhya-prastha their torsos are leaning backward, and from there the heads bend forward again. Only the outermost Apsarasas have one leg stepping forward, which, crossing the other, falls into line with the torso. These forward stepping legs gather up the movement from both ends and round it up into the directing circle.

The elephants also follow these alternating complementary directions. The head of the left elephant runs in the direction of B-B′ down to the horizontal F′-D. From there its trunk is turned inward to fall into line with the head of the Apsaras. The right elephant instead has its lower jaw running along H′-H and then turns its trunk upward along C′-A to lift the jar above the head of the Devī, to the culminating point of the whole composition.

There is another set of lines that marks the transversal connection between figures in an ascending or descending sequence, and this is governed by the diameters D′-D and F-F′ and their parallels.

D′-D and F-F′ = run from the hips of the outermost Aspasaras to the breasts of the first Apsarasas, then from Laksmi's navel to her wrists on the opposite side, to the top of the vessels borne by the first Apsarasas to their brows and the top of the crown of the second Apsarasas.
E′-C and E-G′ = cross one another on the brow of Lakṣmī and mark the ascent from the ears of the outermost Apsarasas to the headdresses of the first Apsarasas and from there up to the ears of the elephants on the opposite side.
F′-B = through the extension of the right elephant's head and raised trunk.
D-H′ = across the left elephant, converging with the previous line on the water-jar in the centre.
C′-E and G-E′ = run from the shins of the outermost to the knees of the first Apsarasas, from there to the ankles of Lakṣmī, to the waist of the first and the shoulders of the second Apsarasas on the opposite sides.
F-B′ and D′-H = connect the hips of the outermost with the knees of the first Apsarasas, and end on the feet of the front Apsaras on the opposite side.

A radiating movement is also discernible, as between the two diameters just described, and then all around the circumference between every two alternate diameters; but in the context of the composition this does not seem to be significant, except for sustaining the tendency of all movements towards the middle-part.

All this goes to show that not only the lines of the Space-division, but also the lines of the Time-division are set with the utmost mathematical precision.

Integration

Despite its perfect symmetry and its strict geometrical order this composition has great ease and fluidity of movement. The subtly calculated construction that is at its base is dissolved into a lively play of forms and rhythms. Neither is the panel overcrowded, nor are there any deep shadowy recesses between figures. There is light and breathing space, and all forms are embedded into the shallow undulating background as into a vaporous atmosphere. The even distribution over the entire panel of form-elements of almost equivalent plastic strength leaves no room for tension or stress of any kind. The subtle interplay of only two pairs of complementary and therefore directly related space-directions, which forms the texture of the entire panel, has no rupture anywhere. It has a continuous, unending flow and gives all figures that relaxed and leisurely sway, suggestive of the watery element to which they belong.

Lakṣmī, the principal figure, has the tiniest frame of all, but she dominates the composition by her compactness and central position. Suspended as if in mid-air, in the centre of a clear space that surrounds her on all sides, hers is the only figure with a strictly vertical axis. Her small frame is compactly modelled and enlivened by sharp and closely-knit accents of light and shade. She forms a closed and self-sufficient entity in herself, which sets her apart from all other figures around her. The Apsarasas bend to and fro in elongated arabesques, and the elephants' heads are broadly spread out across space. The Apsarasas, in the languid, fluid lightness of their movements resemble swaying lotus stalks suspended in water. The elephants, in spite of their enormous bulk do not crush the delicate figures below them, because their flat modelling keeps them weightless and airy like changeable, floating clouds. Their masses produce a landscape-like background, which does not overpower, but only helps to enhance by contrast the slender grace of Lakṣmī and the four Apsarasas.

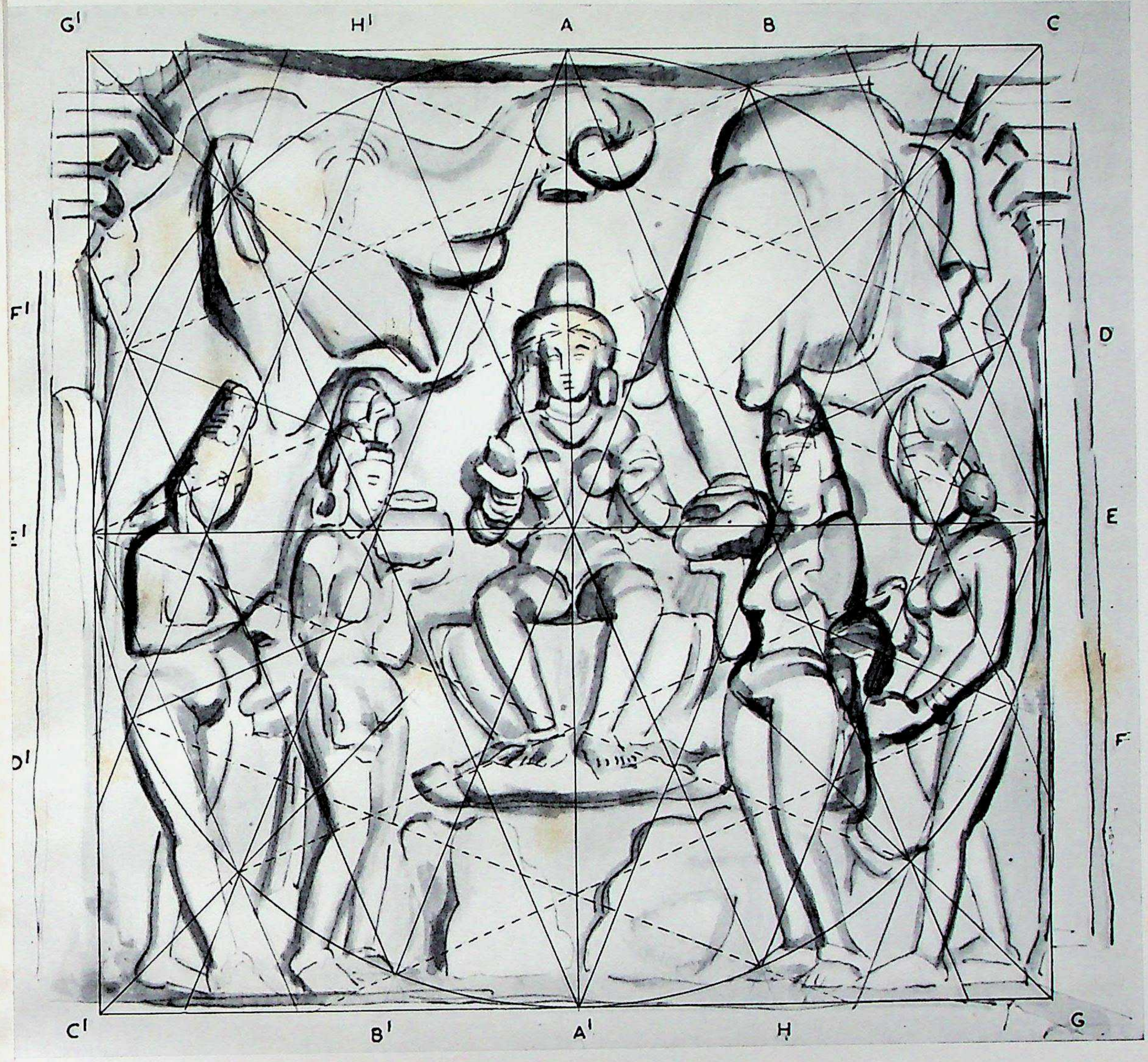
The Milk-ocean is not spread out like a predella, as it is in the two other Lakṣmī-reliefs, but only suggested by two lotus-leaves, from the middle of which the opening flower and Lakṣmī are emerging.

Lakṣmī herself is youthful and virginal, like the fresh bud of a lotus-flower not yet unfolded. In the dawn of Creation she has arisen from the foam of the ocean, suggested in the curly, wavy outlines of the lotus-leaves, and is filled with innocent wonder. Through the cleft opening between the two lotus-leaves the primordial element brought forth the Goddess and established her in the world.

The figure of Lakṣmī does not suggest the all-embracing majesty of a Mother-Goddess or a World-Mother. She is in her Kanyā aspect, the ever youthful Goddess who, like Tripurasundarī, moves the Worlds by her eternal power of fascination.

It is the birth of the Great Goddess that is here represented, the breath-taking moment, when Lakṣmī's glory emerging from the Waters appears to the wonderstruck Devatās. The image is exquisitely sensuous and passionate, full of the freshness and the fragrance of primordial nature. The treatment of form is impressionistically sensitive. The smooth, simple and delicate modelling adds to the fluid lightness of all movements and creates the 'bhāva' of the water element, which could not, by means of sculpture in the hardest stone, be rendered with more engaging and striking evidence. A vaporous atmosphere envelops all the figures, like the shining haze above the ocean on a radiant morning:

"Then arose the Apsarasas with gold-necklaces and clad in beautiful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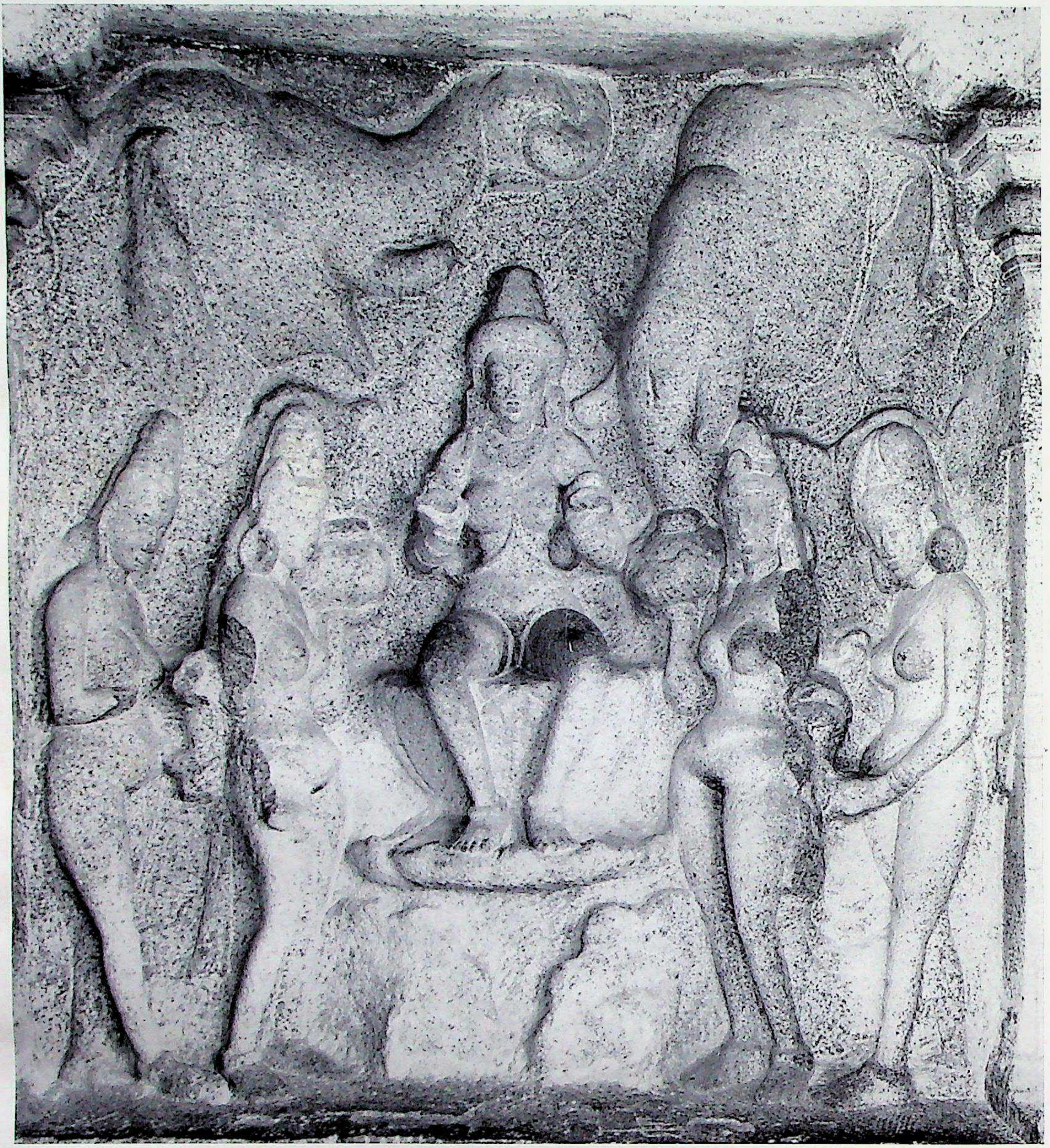
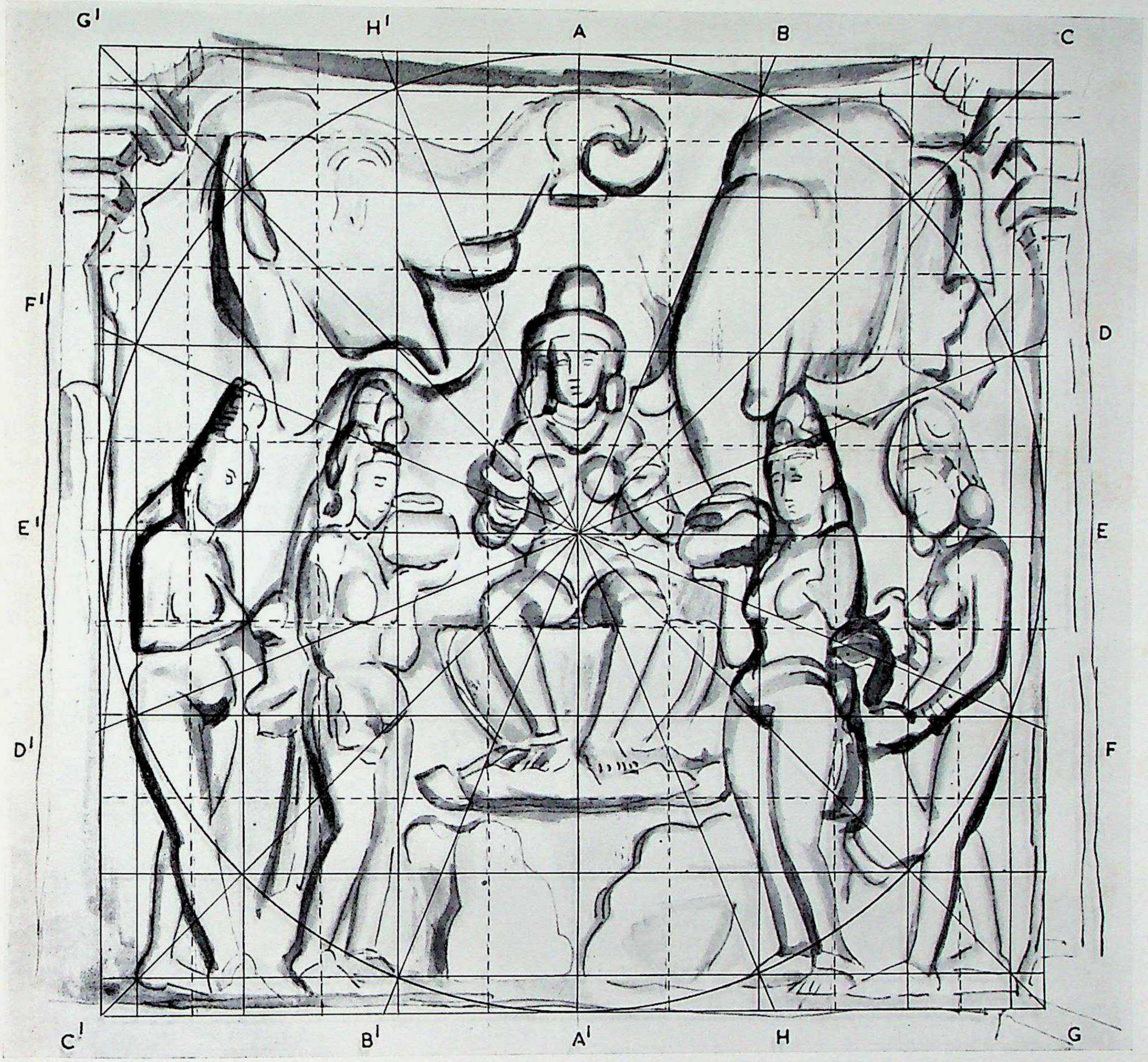
b. TIME DIVISION



MAHĀLAKṢMĪ, MAHĀBALIPURAM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a. SPACE DIVISION

garments, who delight the occupants of Svarga by their sweet gait, their sports and their eye-glances".

"Next shone out of the sea the glorious Goddess Ramā, the very Lakṣmī devoted to the most glorious Lord, illuminating with her splendour all the cardinal points like a streak of lightning rising against the Mount Sudāman".

Śrīmad Bhāgavata, Sk. 8. Adh 8, Verse 7-8, transl. by S. Subbarau.

CHAPTER FIVE

VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA OR VĀMANA AVATĀRA
ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.
PLATE VII

Viṣṇu in his Dwarf Manifestation has come to defeat the Asura King Bali, who by the force of his austerities had not only acquired sovereignty over the entire earth, but had conquered the Heaven of Indra himself and had driven all the gods into exile. Āditi, the mother of the gods, seeing the distress of her sons, prayed to Viṣṇu to come to their rescue and to restore them to position and power. In the garb of a mendicant Brāhmaṇa of dwarfish stature Viṣṇu comes to King Bali with the request to grant him as much land, as he may be able to cover with three strides. Bali immediately acceeds to this modest demand, in spite of the warnings of his Guru Śukrācārya, who knows that the dwarf is none other than Viṣṇu. No sooner the promise is given, than Viṣṇu assumes his own divine form and with one stride covers the earth, with the second stride the skies, and with the third stride, putting his foot on Bali's head, pushes him down into the nether worlds (Pātālaloka or Sutala). The small group on the left side of the panel represents Bali pouring Ganges-water into the Brāhmaṇa's hands to make his promise irrevocable and the small group on the right side shows Viṣṇu's attendant Garuḍa catching Bali by his hair and raising his hand to strike and to tie him down with Varuṇa's ropes. The central figure of the panel shows the eight armed Viṣṇu, expanded into his divine universal form, stepping across earth and sky.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE
PLATE VIIa

The panel is perfectly square and the division through the centres of height and breadth presents no problem. The circumference of the directing circle touches the outer limits of the panel and is divided by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the left side of Viṣṇu's face and through the middle of his chest, down along the vertical fold of his garment.

H′-B′ = along the inner outline of Viṣṇu's right forearm raised with the cakra and down to his foot, between the line of his vertical right leg and the drapery falling from his hip.

B-H = along the inner side of the forearm raised with the śaṅkha, the inner limit of the shield and the back of Bali.

The interspace between these two lines contains Viṣṇu's figure up to the elbows of his outstretched arms on either side. This central portion of the panel is kept clear of all other form-elements and is framed in by vertical forms on both sides, running along its limits.

G′-C′ = marks the outer limit of the hand raised with the arrow, the hilt of the sword, and the front-line of Garuḍa's body. The interspace between H′-B′ and G′-C′ holds all Viṣṇu's right forearms, his hanging hip-drapery and the vanquished Bali.

C-G = marks the wrists of the two hands on the bow and the back of the standing Bali's figure. In the interspace between B-H and C-G are: all Viṣṇu's left forearms, his left shank, the shield and three figures of the Bali group.

The lines G′-C′ and C-G mark the central axes of the lateral groups, one descending through the body of Garuḍa and the other through the body of King Bali. The two outermost vertical space-divisions contain an array of vertical forms, pressed into the outermost limits of the panel, where they run along the side-pilasters. Behind Viṣṇu the vertical sequence of Garuḍa's body with the raised arm and Viṣṇu's mace, and in front, Viṣṇu's two hands and the raised foot connected by the line of the bow, and the figure of the attendant holding the umbrella behind Bali.

Of the groups filling the lower corners, the left one of King Bali with the Dwarf is enclosed within a square, while the right one of Garuḍa and Bali forms, together with the drapery hanging from Viṣṇu' ship, an upright rectangle.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = through Viṣṇu's hip-line along the belts, along the wrist of the hand holding the shield, through the wrist of the hand holding the sword and along the lower limit of the mace.

Madhya-bindu = on Viṣṇu's hip-belt in the region of the navel.

The long sword, passing through three vertical space-divisions, puts, in spite of its slight deflection, a strong accent on the horizontal middle-line. It forms a bridge between the small groups on the right and the left, and creates a division between the happenings in the inferior world of Bali and the tremendous event taking place in the world of Viṣṇu. From this line upwards begin all expanding movements.

F′-D = through Viṣṇu's shoulders and the length of his outstretched left arms.
G′-C = through the base of his mukuṭa and through the wrist of his hand holding the śankha. It marks the upper reach of the mace, of the hands with the arrow and the cakra on the right, and of the hand with the bow on the left side.
D′-F = through Garuḍa's outstretched arm and shoulder, along the curve of the drapery between Viṣṇu's legs and between the shield and the group of Bali.
C′-G = through the waistlines of the small figures on the left and the shoulders of the vanquished Bali.
B′-H = along the feet of all figures and the ground.

The connection of the two small groups with the central figure of Viṣṇu is brought about on one side by the shield and on the other by the drapery falling from Viṣṇu's hip. One of these forms is round and the other is straight-lined, but the modelling of both is hollow, and therefore plastically they respond to one another. Moreover they are connected by another slightly concave form, the big drapery between Viṣṇu's legs, whose curve swings from the group of Garuḍa across his foot up to the shield in his lowest left hand.

Time Division or Movement

Plate VIIb

Essential diameters: D′-D, and B′-B

These two movements cross one another at an angle of 45° at the vital centre of Viṣṇu's body, around the Maṇipūra cakra. This spacial and vital centre is emphasized by the belts and draperies around Viṣṇu's waist and hips, by which it is encircled.

D′-D = determines the forward thrust of Viṣṇu's leg and runs backward down into the shoulder of Garuḍa.
E′-C = its upper parallel, marks the backward thrust of Viṣṇu's right arms and the forward thrust of his left arms, a movement running out from the middle in two opposite directions.

These two parallels, sweeping across the panel from side to side represent the greatest and most powerful dynamic stress of the whole composition. Further parallels above and below are subservient to these, showing a forward ascending progression of scattered smaller form-elements.

F′-B = ascent from the hand holding the arrow to the hand holding the cakra, to the mukuṭa of Viṣṇu and the hand holding the śaṅkha.
G′-A = ascent from the top of the mace to the top of the mukuṭa.
C′-E = ascent from the shoulder of the kneeling Bali, along the upper drapery between Viṣṇu's legs to the hand within the shield and across the widest extension of the shield.
B′-F = ascent from Viṣṇu's foot along the hem of his garment to Bali's shoulder and the head of his attendant.

This movement is delicately balanced by a few accents along the complementary lines directed by the diameter F′-F.

F′-F = descends from Viṣṇu's right elbows to the shield on the left.
G′-E = from the tip of the arrow-hand through Viṣṇu's neck and left armpit, marking approximately the direction of the left upper arm.
H′-D = from the centre of the mukuṭa to the wrist of the left extended arm with the tarjanī-mudrā and to the raised foot.
A-C = marks the direction of the saṅkha and ends in the hand with the bow.
E′-G = descends from Garuḍa's head to the bend in the bodies of King Bali and his attendant.
D′-H = marks the direction of Garuḍa's upper arm and ends along the feet of the Bali group on the left.
C′-A′ = passes through the kneeling Bali's shoulder and marks Viṣṇu's ankle-line.

All these transversal movements are strung upon one line which is the vital axis of the entire composition and is represented by the diameter B′-B.

B′-B = from Viṣṇu's foot placed on the ground along the outline of his thigh and chest to the highest point, the hand held aloft with the śankha.

The entire weight of Viṣṇu's body is lying on this diameter. It holds together the powerful cumulation of transversal movements, sweeping forward and backward across the panel. It is followed by parallels of minor importance.

C′-A = runs up between the figures of Garuḍa and Bali, along the knot of Viṣṇu's drapery and his right shoulder to the centre of his mukuṭa.
D′-H′ = from Garuḍa's elbow upwards between the four right hands of Viṣṇu, dividing them two by two.

In the interspace there is the long slant of Garuḍa's body, Viṣṇu's arm with the sword and his forearm with the cakra, parallel to the slant of his body. Also Bali's body is conform to this direction.

A′-C = up along the hem of Viṣṇu's drapery and the inner outline of his shield to the wrist of his hand holding the bow.

H-D = from Vāmana's foot to the head of Bali, and through the shield to Viṣṇu's raised foot.
G-E = along the legs of the standing Bali.

This upward movement is checked by a few minor form-elements along the complementary diameter H′-H and its parallels.

They are:- the tilt of Viṣṇu's mukuṭa, the bend of his hand with the śaṅkha and of his hand holding the shield, the right side of his chest, the forward bend of Bali's and his attendant's torso and the front outline of the small group to the right, from Garuḍa's head to the knee of Bali.

These forms stand at right angles to the transversal movement along D′-D and rhythmically articulate its progression.

Besides the axis B′-B, which is the spine, or connecting link, of this form-composition torn between two opposite stresses, there is another form-configuration which helps to hold all its elements together. It is the central triangle C′-A-G, which from its apex above Viṣṇu's head runs down on both sides into the small groups, and thus connects them with one another and with the central figure.

There is another smaller, approximately equilateral triangle, with its base on the line of the sword, its sides along both arms holding sword and shield and its apex on Viṣṇu's head, which stands as a solid framework at the centre of the composition and holds all scattered form-elements together. This triangle is slightly tilted, following the line of the sword at its base.

The line of the sword articulates Viṣṇu's figure in two movements, one below the line running upwards through the right leg, and the other above the line running transversally through the left leg and the arms.

The sword also provides a visual base and support for the upward swing of Viṣṇu's left leg, which otherwise would hang suspended in mid-air, with nothing to rest upon except the semicircular, unsubstantial hangings of the drapery. As far as line movement is concerned, these are a perfectly satisfactory link between the two legs, but would be insufficient as a plastic support.

The line of the sword is slightly tilted downwards from the horizontal, and does not conform itself to any of the diameters. It comes closest to the horizontal, but perhaps a perfect horizontal would have appeared too static, and would have impaired the dynamic aggressiveness of the movement.

The diagonals have no function in this composition, except G′-G, which runs through the arrow and whose upper and lower parallels give the direction of two of Viṣṇu's arms, of the one holding the shield and of the other holding the arrow.

INTEGRATION

The scheme of this composition is striking by its very simplicity. Its whole substance is summed up in two essential movements. These two movements are in the form of a double cross, made up of a central oblique pole and two parallel bars running across at an angle of 45 degrees. Viṣṇu's body is the pole of the cross, and his arms and leg extending in opposite directions are the cross-bars. This cross is like a diagrammatic representation of the three dimensions of space, where the two horizontal axes are hinged upon the one central, polar axis. Viṣṇu, the All-Pervader, is in the form of the three-axed cross of the Universe.

This fundamental lay-out is completed and fulfilled by a clever play of resistances and checks, by which the plastic representation achieves its effectiveness. The taut centrifugal thrust of Viṣṇu's arms is twice checked at vital points. Once at the elbows, from where one arm on either side, one holding the cakra and the other the śaṅkha, are deflected upwards in the vertical. A second time the movement is gathered up at the outer ends into the two verticals of the mace and the bow. These checks, set at rhythmic intervals make the movement operative within its given limits and convey the feeling that it has found its object and end. On the other hand they also create movement within movement, by which the thrust of Viṣṇu's arms appears to be coming forth in successive waves or pulsations. Pulsations suggest recurrence and continuity, which in this case work out into unending, limitless expansion. The small, vertical form-elements in the two lower corners of the panel only help to enhance the feeling of endlessness in the upper part. These diminutive, static figures are, so to say, the measure of the immeasurable, and by contrast of direction and size emphasize the boundless sway of Viṣṇu's gigantic strides.

The vital centre of the centrifugal thrusts in opposite directions is around Viṣṇu's navel, but the controlling balance is held between them by Viṣṇu's head. The whole form of the head with the mukuṭa stands slightly inclined, so as to be exactly perpendicular to the lines of the arms and the raised leg. Calm and serene at the centre of tense expanding forces, the head, with an expression of sympathetic participation, is the spiritual fountain-head that sustains the outflowing energy. It not only governs the outgoing movement that spans the panel from end to end, but, through the two arms holding sword and shield, lets its emanations flow down into the small groups at his feet. This makes the explanatory anecdotes integrating parts of the cosmic drama, and qualifies them as the necessary substratum for the great event of Viṣṇu's descent: its cause and its consequence.

Seen from the psychological angle of the jivātman Viṣṇu appears here in his merciful aspect, in the way he is described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata, Sk. 8, adh. 22. After having overpowered Bali and destroyed his power, he addresses Brahmā with these words:

v. 24. "O, Four-faced One, I put and end to the wealth of that person to whom I show my Grace, for he, who is intoxicated with wealth, gets deprived of reasoning and disregards the world and Myself.

v. 28. "This Bali, the great leader of the Dānavas and Daityas, capable of promoting their glory, has conquered the invincible Māyā, and though cast in suffering, has not lost his sense".

And the noble King Bali, in his defeat, speaks these words:

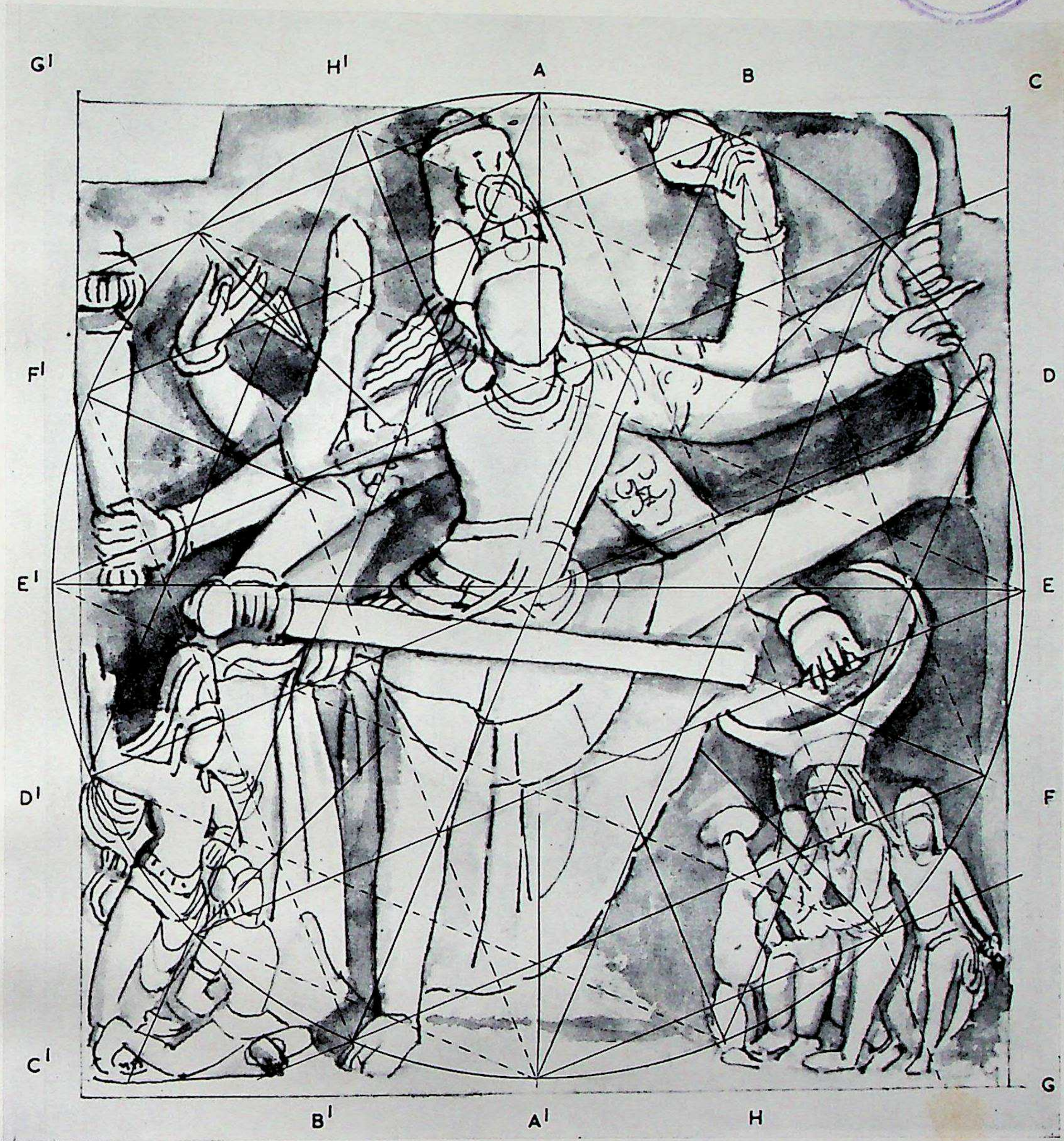
v. 5. "Indirectly, in the guise of an enemy Thou art certainly the highest preceptor to us, Asuras, for, in this fall, Thou hast given an eye to us who have been blinded by pride.

v. 7. "I am now put down by Thee of numerous glorious deeds. Bound with the cords of Varuṇa, I do not feel ashamed, I am not pained."

Transl. by S. Subbarau

State Museum Library Lucknow

PLATE VII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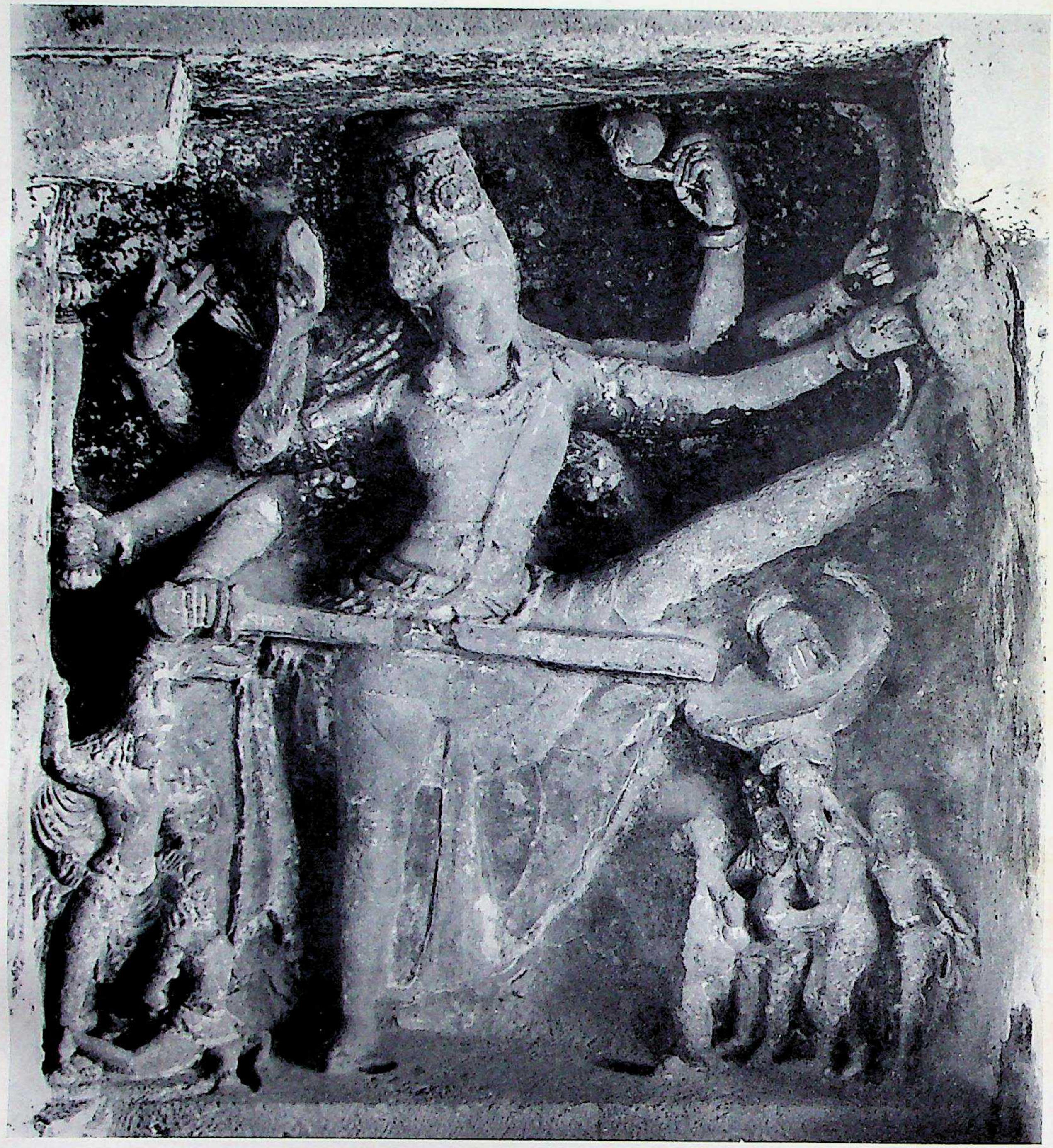
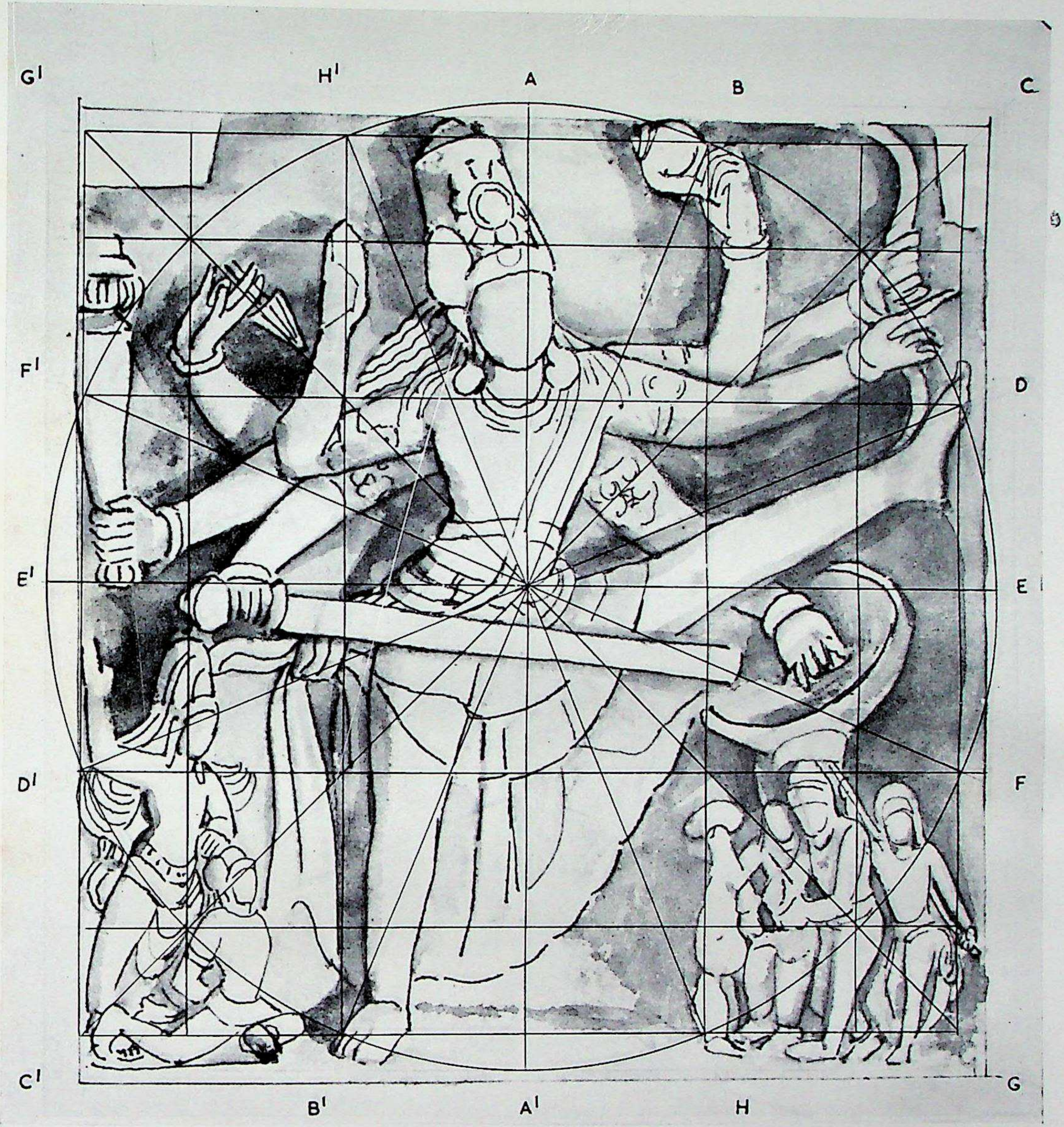
b. TIME DIVISION



VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV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a. SPACE DIVISION

UP State Museum, Lucknow

CHAPTER SIX

VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA OR VĀMANA AVATĀRA

BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE II, 6TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE VIII

The same representation as in the Elūrā panel, with the addition of a few accessory figures: Two Vidyādharas with raised arms flying above Viṣṇu's outstretched left arm. A big, demon-like mask with open mouth in front of Viṣṇu's outstretched forefinger probably represents the Sun, while a small crescent above the Vidyādhara indicates the Moon. In front of Viṣṇu's raised foot a figure with sword and shield is falling head downwards. This figure represents King Triśaṅku, who wanted boḍily to enter Heaven, but having been expelled by Indra, remained suspended in mid-air. The group of King Bali bestowing land on the Dwarf is enlarged by the addition of Bali's Queen and two more attendants. The bigger figure behind King Bali is Śukrācārya, his Guru, who tries to prevent Bali from bestowing the gift. On the right side, in the place of the Asura King receiving his punishment, a fat dwarfish figure is squatting and clasping Viṣṇu's leg. This is supposed to be the guardian of Pātālaloka, trying to stop Viṣṇu and to cause him to fall. Behind him another small figure, most likely an Asura, is grasping a sword, and is pointing an arm towards Viṣṇu as if ready to attack him. Viṣṇu holds the same attributes in his right and his left hands as on the previous image, but they are kept in different positions.

SPACE-DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE VIIIa

This panel is not quite a square. Its height exceeds its width. But rather than a rectangle it looks a somewhat uneven square, the part to the right of the main figure being diminished, perhaps for lack of space towards the inner side of the gallery. Moreover it is broader above than below. When such irregularities occur, the safest thing is to base the madhya-sūtra on the architectural and compositional context. Here the medaillon (kudu) on the entablature indicates the centre of the composition. A madhya-sūtra lowered from its middle gives an exact space-division for the undiminished left half of the composition, and the width of the panel, if completed on the basis of this division, would exactly correspond to its height, and therefore the panel would be a square. The directing circle is also divided by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = along the left side of Viṣṇu's face and mukuṭa, along the drapery crossing the root of his left thigh and the garland falling to his right foot.

H′-B′ = along Viṣṇu's hand raised with the cakra and along his sword, his left hip and down through the middle of the squatting figure.

Viṣṇu's entire figure from head to foot together with the vertically held sword is compressed into the space between these two lines. The sword with the hand holding it runs through the full upper half of the panel.

G′-C′ = through Viṣṇu's two outermost hands and through the figure of the Asura with the sword.

The interspace contains the cross of Viṣṇu's right arms, and half of each of the lower figures. Viṣṇu's arm with the cakra and the two lower figures are more or less assimilated to the vertical.

In the outermost space-division Viṣṇu's hand with the mace fills the upper half, as before his hand with the sword, and the Asura with his sword almost fills the lower half.

B-H = marks the flank of the Vidyādhara and, touching Viṣṇu's bent elbow, runs along the front of Śukrācārya, dividing the Dwarf from the group of Bali and his followers.

The interspace contains the snake-like ascent of Viṣṇu's bow. A strict vertical is given only by the figure of the Dwarf and his umbrella, and by Viṣṇu's arm with the śaṅkha. In the centre, Viṣṇu's arms and leg run across.

C-G = marks the torso and head of the second Vidyādhara, the end of Viṣṇu's shield and raised heel and the front-line of Bali's queen. Within this space-division are contained: both the Vidyādharas, the extremities of Viṣṇu's limbs, and the bodies of three central figures of the Bali group.

D-F = runs through the big mask, along the thigh of Triśaṅku and marks the outer limit of the Bali-group. In the last space-division as on the other side, the vertical is predominant.

Horizontals

The horizontal space-division is very similar to that in the Elūrā panel as far as the figure of Viṣṇu is concerned, except that the madhya-bindu does not fall into the region of the navel, but further out on the root of the raised leg.

Madhya-prastha = across Viṣṇu's hip along the belt, below the hilt of the sword and the hand with the mace, and above the heads of the Bali-group, dividing them from Triśaṅku.

D′-F = from the sword-bearing Asura's shoulder to the crown of the squatting figure and of the Dwarf, and to the shoulders of Bali.
C′-G = from the knee of the Asura and of the squatting figure to the hips of the Dwarf and the queen. Below this line are the legs of all small figures.

The three interspaces below the madhya-prastha are almost entirely filled with arrays of vertical form-elements, standing side by side. In this panel the world of the Asuras is not confined to the outer corners as in the Elūrā panel, but fills the whole gap between Viṣṇu's legs up to the middle line. If the figure of Triśaṅku is added to it, it reaches up to the horizontal F′-D.

F′-D = through Viṣṇu's right upper arm and the root of his neck, it marks the upper limit of his raised foot. Viṣṇu's torso, three of his right and two of his left arms, his leg and the figure of Triśaṅku are contained within the interspace.
G′-C = runs through the base of Viṣṇu's crown and marks the limit of his two upper hands, the one with the cakra and the tarjanī-mudrā. Viṣṇu's face and neck, as well as the lower part of Sūrya's mask are contained in this interspace. Above are Viṣṇu's cakra, mukuṭa, śaṇkha and the Vidyādharas.

Time Division or Movement

Plate VIIIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and D′-D

The fundamental dynamic scheme of this composition is based on the same lines of stress as the one in Elūrā, with certain differences that will be marked in the following. The upward movement is governed by the diameter B′-B and the transversal thrust by the diameter D′-D and its parallels.

D′-D = from the Asura's shoulder through Viṣṇu's hip and along the whole length of his outstretched leg up to the knees of Triśaṅku.
E′-C = from the upper outline of the arm with the mace and the lower outline of the arm with the sword, across Viṣṇu's chest and along the whole length of the outstretched arm up to the mask of Sūrya.

The double transversal thrust of Viṣṇu's leg and two arms appears even more fierce than in the Elūrā panel, because their rigid straight lines are not softened by the slightest bend or inflection. Enclosed between the two, there is, as a further reinforcement, a smaller parallel formed by the arm with the shield and the arm with the bow. Issuing from their common elbow, they move forward and backward in the same direction. On the right side of the panel, however, the movement is less vigorous, because the arms are slightly shortened and movements cramped to fit into the available space.

F′-B = through the middle of both Viṣṇu's uppermost right hands, through his mukuṭa and śaṅkha to the head of the Vidyādhara. The interspace is filled with a row of almost vertical forms placed side by side: Viṣṇu's two right forearms, his sword, his head and bow and the two Vidyādharas.
C′-E = along the squatting man's arm upwards to the Dwarf's and Bali's heads, and the heads of his last attendants. Apart from Viṣṇu's leg and the torso of Triśanku, all forms in this interspace stand across.
B′-F = from the squatting figure's feet to Viṣṇu's ankle, the arms of the Dwarf and Bali and the shoulders of the queen. Also here, with exception of the squatting man's arm, all form-elements are more or less in the vertical, and the same is the case in the last interspace, i.e. in the left lowest corner.
F′-F = the complementary diameter has less importance. It determines the direction of Viṣṇu's two right forearms, holding the arrow and the sword and the descent along the heads of Bali and his queen.
E′-G = from the hilt of the mace across Viṣṇu's thigh to the neck of the Dwarf, the groin of Bali and of his queen.
D′-H = from the arm of the Asura to the shoulder of the squatting figure down to the feet of Bali.
G′-E = from the hand with the cakra along Viṣṇu's jaw, it gives the direction of his left upper arm holding the bow, and of Triśaṅku's shoulders.

Except for this last line, all others only establish connections between separate form-elements.

The transversal movements are hinged, as in Elūrā, upon the oblique diameter B′-B, which is the line of Viṣṇu's upper body.

B′-B = from the middle upwards it marks the inclination of Viṣṇu's left flank, emphasized by the vigorous line of the huge bow, which he holds against his side. From the hip downwards, however, the leg does not follow this slant, but turns into the complementary direction.
C′-A = gives the direction of the upward movement of the Asura with the sword, from his right leg to his left raised arm.

In its slightly undulating movement his form is a delicate response to the line of the bow. It picks up the line of the bow where it was left, in the centre of the diameter and carries it, although on the next parallel, down to the end.

D′-H′ = from the Asura's helmet up along Viṣṇu's arm holding the cakra, whose direction it marks. The long arrow in the last space-division also follows its line, running parallel with the bow.

This movement is almost exclusively confined to the right half of the panel. In the left half, where movements are predominantly transversal, the parallels are only connecting lines between minor form-elements.

A′-C = connects the figure of Vāmana with the two upper hands of Viṣṇu, the second Vidyādhara and the moon.
H-D = connects Bali with the slant of Triśaṅku and ends on the side of Sūrya's mask.

The parallels of the complementary diameter H-H′ are more important here than in the Elūrā panel.

A′-G′ = determines the slant of Viṣṇu's right leg, stemming itself in resistance against the sway of his upper body. This slant is carried upwards into the right elbows which prolong the line of the leg, and flows out along the arm holding the arrow.
B′-F′ = along the back of the squatting figure and the Asura's thigh and head to Viṣṇu's outermost hand holding the mace. The whole bulk of the squatting figure, as it lies in the same direction, lends great support to the movement of Viṣṇu's leg. The Asura's body in the outermost space-division closes the composition in a slant complementary to the arrow in the upper part.
A-G = descends from Viṣṇu's halo and crosses his arms and leg at right angles (the upper arm along the armlet), then passes through Bali's head and left arm, marking the forward bend of his body.
B-F = runs through the backward slant of the first Vidyādhara's body, through Viṣṇu's uppermost wrist, his hand in the shield and his raised foot, and finally along the forward bend of the entire group behind Bali.
B-E = marks the outer limits of Viṣṇu's outstretched hand and foot.

In this composition the dynamic thrust of Viṣṇu's arms and foot is controlled more from inside, than by outer checks and limitations. Not only is the right side of his body stemmed against the thrust, but his two arms bent back towards the body along the two complementaries G′-E and E′-C revert part of the outflowing energy and form together a parallelogram, which gives a solid symmetrical framework in the middle of the centrifugal stresses. It is tighter and more compact than the broad triangle in the Elūrā panel, formed by the two lowered arms and the sword that fulfills the same function. It forms one central nucleus, which by its weight and energy alone holds together the movements running across the panel from end to end.

The figures of the six Gaṇa musicians at the foot of the panel are governed in their positions by the prolongations of the verticals of the space-division, and their movements by the prologations of the obliques

B-B′ and H′-H. Also the prolongations of C′-A′ and G-A′ have a say in the transversal array of their movements.

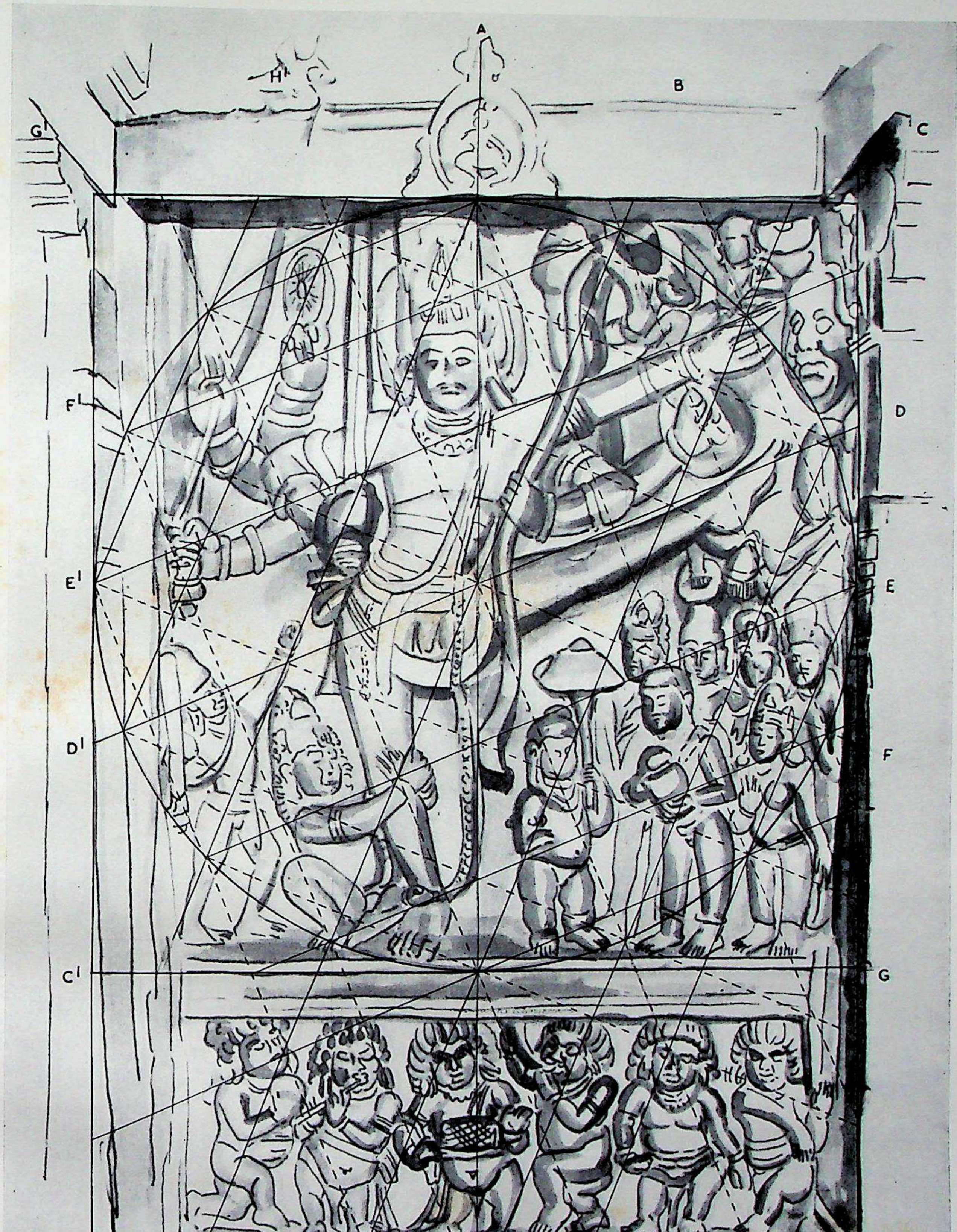
INTEGRATION

Although the fundamental conception of this panel is practically the same as that at Elūrā, and although it is based on the same compositional lay-out, its general aspect and expression are altogether different. Within the given elements of the composition individual interpretation finds its scope in many ways.

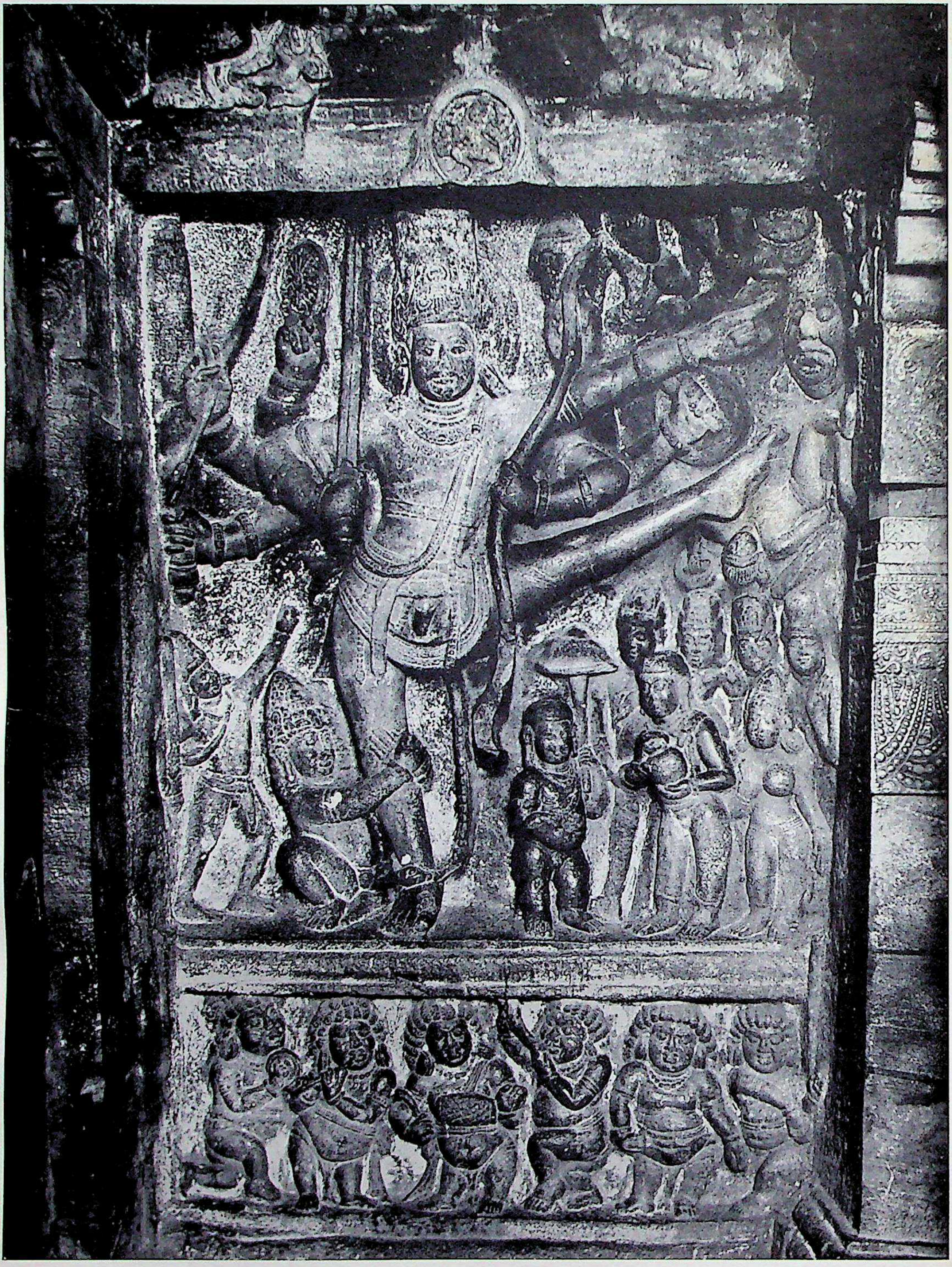
The Trivikrama of Bādāmī appears even more dynamic and powerful than the one at Elūrā. His head and body are in a strictly frontal position and not slightly turned as in the other panel. They are loaded with tension, throwing out the movement, without falling into line with it. The bow and the sword, held close to Viṣṇu's body on either side are concentrating and compressing this tremendous fiery energy, before it is allowed to burst forth in the powerful thrust of leg and arms. By far the greatest amount of energy is given out towards the left side, in the direction of the step. There is not the slightest inflection in the straight, direct movement of the leg and the uppermost arm. The thrust is so overpowering that the equilibrium of the entire figure can only be maintained by stemming the right leg against it, in the direction complementary to that of the torso. The movement is flowing out freely through toes and fingers. It is perhaps because it is so firmly controlled at the centre that it does not require to be held together at the extreme end by a binding line, as in the other panel. The big mask of Sūrya and the figure of Triśanku create sufficiently strong bounds.

The greatest departure from the Elūrā scheme is perhaps this, that the impetus of the movement is predominantly directed towards the left and there is no equivalent movement on the right side to balance it. While in the Elūrā panel the movement is evenly directed towards both sides and forms a cross with the body, here it is more unilateral. The arms of the right side are not developed to the same length. They are shortened and bent, and form a kind of cluster that by its mass and weight alone and not by its movement is able to balance the other side. The same can be said of the squatting figure clasping Viṣṇu's standing leg, doubling its inward slant and which, by its bulk and weight helps in balancing the outward thrust of the other leg.

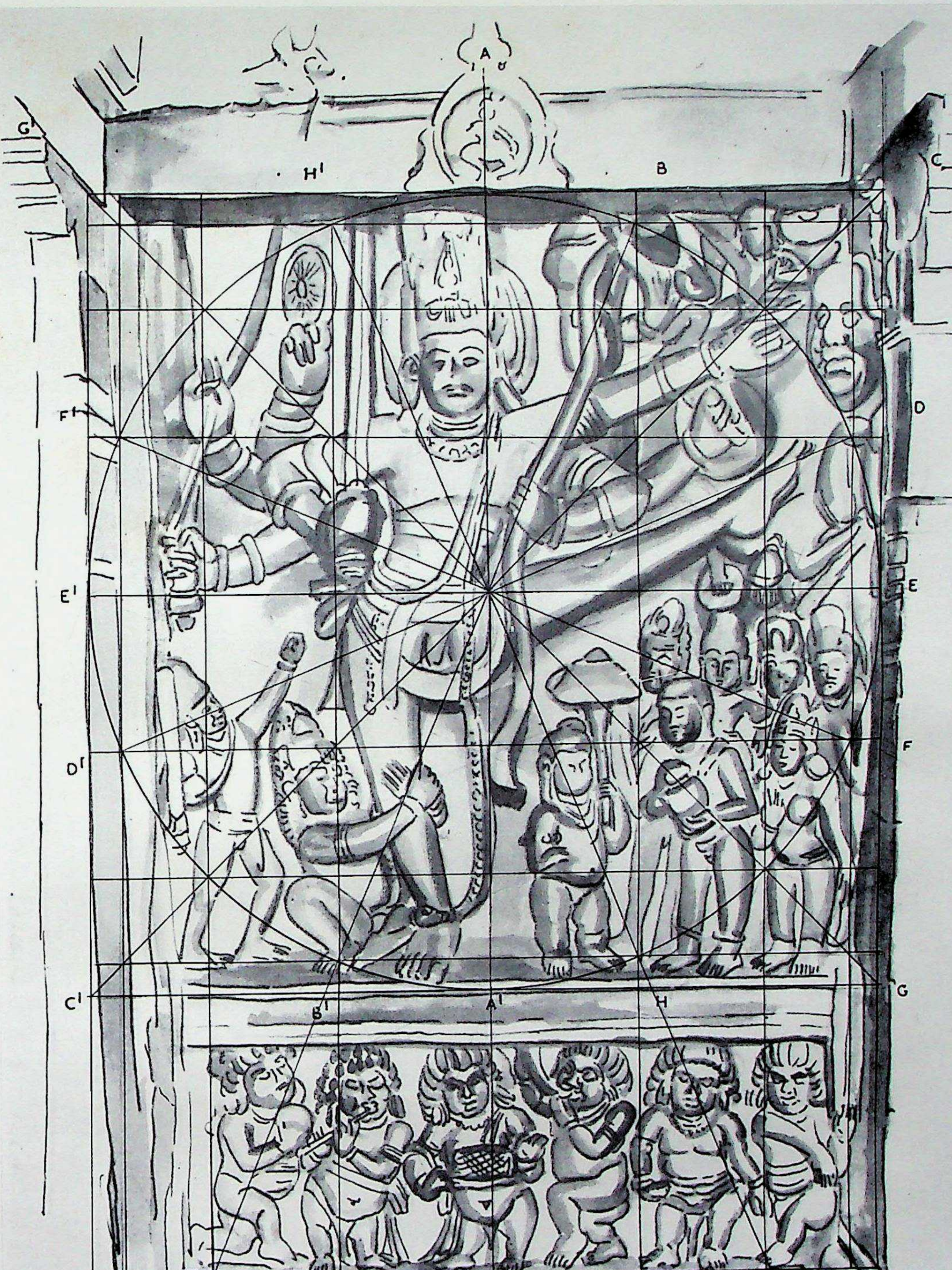
But curiously, on the left, on the side of the greatest strees, Viṣṇu does


A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
H¹
G¹
F¹
E¹
D¹
C¹
B¹
A¹

b. TIME DIVISION



VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA, BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE II


A
G'
H'
B
C
F'
D
E'
E
D'
F
C'
B'
A'
H
G

a. SPACE DIVISION

UP State Museum, Lucknow

not stand, as in Elūrā, in a void with freedom for his movements. He is hemmed in by the minor figures that fill all the empty spaces. His connection with the other groups is not by subtle lines of stress, but by the mere physical contrast between his broad transversal sweep and the mass of vertical form-elements placed against it. The composition on the whole consists in blunt juxtapositions of antagonistic form-elements, whose friction induces an explosive tension fiercer than that which in the Elūrā image is brought about by judiciously and organically disposed space-directions. It makes the character of this Viṣṇu appear more primeval and unhuman.

Moreover in this figure the madhya-bindu is in the groin, at the point of discruption of all space-directions. This always gives a greater vehemence to movements than when, as in the Elūrā panel, the madhya-bindu is at the navel. When the madhya-bindu corresponds to the navel, it always has a unifying and centralizing tendency, or at the least it gives a central hold to outgoing movements.

In his severe and hieratic frontal position Viṣṇu appears entirely unconcerned with the action he is performing. While the Viṣṇu at Elūrā is in an attitude of humane, inner participation, this Viṣṇu is, in his majestic, supreme aloofness, striding far above the human world. Rather than a merciful friend, he appears here in his terrifying universal form, such as he appeared to King Bali in the hour of his extreme defeat:

> 21. "That dwarf form of Hari wonderfully expanded itself, encompassing all that are composed of the three Guṇas, *viz.*, the earth, the heavens, cardinal points, Svarga, caves, seas, birds and beasts, human beings, gods, sages and whatever there was.
>
> 30. "On seeing this Universe resting on the Perfect person, all the Asuras lost their hearts, O Son, (especially) on seeing His Cakra called Sudarśana of irresistible force and splendour, the Saṅga-bow resounding like thundering clouds.
>
> 33. "Adorned with Vanamāla hovered about by bees the glorious Lord of mighty feet shone supreme and covered the whole earth of Bali with one foot, the Sky with the main body, and the cardinal points with His arms.
>
> 34. "As the second step measured Svarga there was nothing left for the third; the foot of the Lord of glorious Power above and below passed beyond Maharloka, Janaloka and also Tapoloka and reached Satyaloka.
>
> Śrīmad Bhāgavata, Sk. 8, Adh. 20, v. 21, 30, 33, 34. Transl. by S. Subbarau.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA OR VĀMANA AVATĀRA

MAHĀBALIPURAM, 7TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE IX

Viṣṇu Trivikrama is here represented with a different set of surrounding figures. Instead of the episodes of Bali promising the Dwarf three paces of ground and of Bali being seized by Garuḍa, there are four big figures crouching on the ground at Viṣṇu's feet. The two on his left side are clutching their weapons as if ready to fight. They may represent the Asuras defeated by Viṣṇu, or, according to the story as it is told in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata, they may represent Viṣṇu's attendants, who took up arms against the aggressive Asuras. Their resigned or disgruntled attitudes, however, give more support to the interpretation that they are vanquished Asuras. The one next to Viṣṇu's left side is arched up on his belly as if he had just been overthrown by Viṣṇu's stride. He is falling on his sword and raising one hand in an attitude of wonder (vismaya hasta). This may perhaps be Bali himself, asking what has happened to him. The last one is grasping his mace and is defiantly turning back towards Viṣṇu. In the middle spaces on both sides of Viṣṇu are the figures of Sūrya and Candra, Sun and Moon, raising their hands towards Viṣṇu, and in the upper corners Brahmā and Śiva seated on their lotus thrones. Brahmā is worshipping Viṣṇu's left foot, which has touched Satya-loka, the highest Heaven. To the extreme left along the pilasser there is, as in Bādāmī, Triśaṅku hanging head downward, in mid-air. Above Viṣṇu's left extended arm the king of bears, Jāmbavat, is encircling Viṣṇu's head beating his drum in honour of his victory.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE IXa

The composition is enclosed within a horizontal rectangle. The diameter of the directing circle is equal to the height of the panel. According to form-criteria the central square enclosing the circle is not quite in the middle. On the right side it reaches to the capital of the pilaster, on the left side only to the projecting bracket below the ceiling. Some of the lateral forms remain out of the square. The circle is divided by eight diameters, and because all of them are put to use, the texture of the composition is rather complex. This complexity, however, is brought into a clear order by being organized into different separate groups of forms and movements. In the right half of the panel movements run predominantly in the vertical, in the left predominantly in the oblique. This creates a division of the form-context into a static and a dynamic half, with the solemn figure of Viṣṇu standing between the two sides, harmonizing and integrating them into an organic whole.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = along the long bow and Viṣṇu's left side, his entire body standing between this line and the parallel H′-B′. His figure is a straight vertical from foot to crown, doubled by the line of the bow pressed against his chest, and by the left arm of the Asura seated against his leg.

H′-B′ = Along Viṣṇu's right side, between his raised arm and his head, through the body of the second Asura down to the point of his knee.
G′-C′ = along Śiva's raised hand, through the wrist of Viṣṇu's hand with the mace and down along the inner line of the first Asura's arm.

In the interspace there is a second array of vertical forms carried through the entire height of the panel in an uninterrupted sequence: body, head and mukuṭa of the second Asura, Viṣṇu's sword and his arm sustaining heaven.

F′-D′ = marks the third vertical array of forms; through Śiva's, Sūrya's and the first Asura's bodies. A vertical tangent on the circle runs along the backs of these three figures.
B-H = marks the limit of Jāmbavat's and of the third Asura's bodies. Both these figures are contained in the interspace between this line and the madhya-sūtra. Viṣṇu's left arms, and his raised leg run across.
C-G = marks Brahmā's front-line, the outer limit of Candra and of Viṣṇu's shield, and the last Asura's chest-line. The figure of Candra, Viṣṇu's shield and all his left extremities are contained within this space-division, besides arms and legs of the last two Asuras.
D-F = marks the outer limit of Brahmā, the arm-line of Triśaṅku, and falls through the armpit of the last Asura to the point of his right foot. A vertical tangent on the circle runs between the two hanging arms of Triśaṅku and along the back of the last Asura. The outer space belongs to Triśaṅku alone, apart from the Asura's shank in its lower part.

In this left part of the panel there are only few and small vertical forms. This side is filled with the oblique trends of Viṣṇu's leg and arms, of Jāmbavat, of Candra and of the two Asuras. Only in the outermost space-division does this trend subside into the vertical with the hanging leg and arms of Triśaṅku and the shank of the last Asura.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = through Viṣṇu's waist-belt, dividing his body into two equal halves, then on the right side through the hilt of his sword, the horizontal extension of Sūrya's leg, and on the left along Candra's extended arm and shoulders to the hand and knee of Triśaṅku.

It connects two corresponding features at both ends of the panel, Sūrya's and Triśaṅku's bent knees, one horizontal and the other vertical. Passing above the mukuṭas of all four Asuras, it delimits the nether worlds from the heavenly worlds above. But in order to avoid including Candra in the nether worlds, it would perhaps be more correct to divide the panel into three horizontal layers, the nether worlds reaching to the line D′-F along the shoulders of the Asuras, the middle region (antarikṣa) from D′-F to F′-D, containing Sūrya, Candra and Triśaṅku, and the heavenly regions (svarga) from there to the top, containing Viṣṇu's head, Brahmā, Śiva and Jāmbavat.

Madhya-bindu = at the root of Viṣṇu's raised leg, in the hip-joint, at the point of disruption of all space-directions, as in the Bādāmī figure.

D′-F = marks the shoulder-line of all four Asuras. In the interspace above are all the Asuras' heads and the figure of Candra up to his shoulders.

C′-G = through the waist-line of the Asuras and along their bent forearms, it marks the upper level of their legs extended on the ground. Their upper bodies are all contained in the interspace above this line, and their legs fill the bottom of the panel.

F′-D = from Sūrya's head to the back of Triśaṅku, through Viṣṇu's right forearm holding the mace and his left hand holding the śaṅkha. The interspace contains Viṣṇu's torso and his shield, and the upper parts of the bodies of Sūrya and Triśaṅku.

G′-C = from Śiva's bent arms to those of Brahmā in symmetrical correspondence, from Viṣṇu's right hand raised with the cakra, through the base of his mukuṭa, and along the lower rim of Jāmbavat's drum to the pointed forefinger of Viṣṇu's left hand. It marks the upper limit of his raised leg also, in one line with his forehead.

This line runs through the middle of the heavenly regions, which, as we saw already, fill the upper third of the panel. F′-D forms the axis through the ensemble of Viṣṇu's arms on both sides, which, considered as a whole are a horizontal mass, in spite of the fact that the arms follow singly various oblique trends.

The horizontal space-division shows a much greater measure of symmetry than the vertical space-division. The figure of Śiva corresponds to that of Brahmā, the figure of Sūrya to that of Triśaṅku, and the four Asuras, being distributed in equal numbers on both sides, give a strong symmetrical base to the whole composition.

A concentric array is also discernible in the radial disposition of the auxiliary figures with respect to the central figure of Viṣṇu. And this especially in the upper parts. They are contained within the sectors between the various diameters which expand fanwise around the central figure.

Examples

Between F′ and G′ = two forearms of Viṣṇu opening towards the figure of Śiva, the lines encompassing capitals and bracket of the side-pilaster.
Between G′ and A = Viṣṇu's uppermost r. arm and head.
Between A and C = opening between Viṣṇu's head and raised leg, with Jāmbavat in the middle.
Between C and D = seat and torso of Brahmā with Viṣṇu's hand and śaṅkha, plus capitals and bracket of the side-pilaster.
Between D and F = Candra's torso, the entire figure of Triśaṅku and the last Asura's head.
Between F and G = Candra's legs and the last Asura's torso and left leg.
Between G and A′ = the third Asura and the right leg of the last Asura.
Between H and B′ = opening between the arms of the second and the third Asura, containing Viṣṇu's standing leg and the back and right leg of the third Asura.
Between B′ and D′ = the bodies of the first and second Asura.
Between D′ and F′ = lower half of Viṣṇu's sword and the mukuṭa of the second Asura, the figure of Sūrya and the head of the first Asura.

All these peripheral forms in a circular array counterbalance and hold together the expanding movements issuing from the figure of Viṣṇu at the centre.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE IXb

Essential diameters: H′-H, B-B′, D′-D, C′-C, besides the vertical A-A′.

The diameters H′-H and B-B′ are so interdependent in their complementary functions, that they can be dealt with together instead of separately. They form an oblique cross within the two central interspaces, connecting Jāmbavat's figure with the lowered forearm and knee of the second Asura, and Viṣṇu's uppermost right hand with the right arm of the third Asura. Their ends lie at four prominent points: Viṣṇu's raised hand, Jāmbavat's snout, the forward pointing knees of the second and fourth Asuras, the latter lying slightly aside. Their next parallels on either side form two intersecting triangles with vertexes A and A′, in which the dynamic function of their space-directions appear. The inverted triangle between A′-G′ and A′-C circumscribes the rising and expanding movement from Viṣṇu's foot on the ground to his right hand holding the cakra and his left hand with the extended forefinger.

A′-G′ = along Viṣṇu's right shin and his forearm raised with the cakra.
A′-C = along the inclination of the third Asura's body and the hem of Viṣṇu's garment, across his three extended left hands to Brahmā's head.

Further parallels on either side:

H-D = up along the inner outline of the fourth Asura and the side of Candra to the shoulder of Triśaṅku.

The interspace contains an upward flow of movements from the third Asura to the figures of Candra and Brahmā.

G-E = axis through the slant of the last Asura's body and across the middle of Triśaṅku.
A further parallel tangent on the circle runs through the flank of the Asura and through the length of Triśaṅku's thigh. Further out the Asura's thigh lies in the same direction.
B′-F′ = along the backward slant of the second Asura and the front of Sūrya up to the point of his mukuṭa. The interspace is filled in the lower part by the body of the Asura that lies in its direction. All other forms lie across.
C′-E′ = axis through the first Asura's head, touching the back of Sūrya's halo.
A further parallel tangent on the circle runs through the back of the Asura's mukuṭa and Sūrya's shank. In the outer triangle the forms also straighten out into the vertical.

These ascending movements in complementary directions are carried through more forcefully in the left half of the panel by means of closely knit groups along the line A′-C′ and its parallels, while on the right side, form-groups being at a distance from one another, the sequence is looser and movements are interrupted by form-elements that lie across.

The upright triangle between A-C′ and A-G is much less pronounced and has only a complementary, balancing function. Strong accents are only apparent in its outer parallels.

A-C′ = from the top of the madhya-sūtra through Viṣṇu's head, the root of his right arm, his right lower hand to the groin of the first Asura. Viṣṇu's yajñopavīta runs in its direction.

H′-D′ = down along Viṣṇu's uppermost right forearm and Sūrya's hand and knee to the mukuṭa and outer knee of the first Asura. It divides Śiva and Sūrya from the central part of the panel.

G′-E′ = marks the slant of Viṣṇu's heavy mace, continued along Sūrya's body from his left shoulder to his right knee.

The outer parallel tangent on the circle marks the slant of Śiva's body.

A-G = marks the direction of Viṣṇu's upper arm holding the bow and of Candra's forearm, it runs across his hip and ends in the groin of the last Asura.

B-F = runs from Jāmbavat's snout along Viṣṇu's raised foot, his hand with the śaṅkha, his shield, Candra's head and down through the head, left arm and left shank of the fourth Asura. Between A-G and B-F all form-elements lie across: Jāmbavat, Viṣṇu's leg, arm and shield, Candra, and the last Asura. B-F limits the outer reach of all these form-elements, except for Viṣṇu's sūci-hasta, which points across.

C-E = from Viṣṇu's sūci-hasta to the point of the last Asura's mukuṭa. The oblique parallel tangent on the circle runs along Brahmā's face and hand, and the outer arm and shin of Triśaṅku.

The sequence of these two figures hems in the composition in the same way as Viṣṇu's mace and the figure of Sūrya do on the other side. All the four outermost oblique lines tangent on the circle form, together with the upper and lower horizontal limit of the panel, a somewhat broadened hexagon enclosing all the main features of the composition and emphasizing their concentric disposition. Their inner parallels H′-D′ and B-F together with the upper and lower horizontals form a trapezium standing on its broad base and enclosing Viṣṇu and the four Asuras, while the complementary lines B′-F′ and H-D form a trapezium standing on its narrow side, enclosing Viṣṇu with the two Asuras next to him, Candra and the three uppermost figures. All these, which are essentially lines of stress, are helping also to establish a clear and neat space-articulation.

Now we come to a feature which is quite particular to this image of Trivikrama and distinguishes it from the others previously described. It is the use of the diagonal diameter for the line of the raised leg, which does not run parallel to the outstretched arms, but lies across them and is joined at its end with the uppermost arm.

C′-C = the diagonal, forms the axis of Viṣṇu's raised leg and continues its trend up to Brahmā's shoulder.

B′-D = its lower parallel starting from the knee of the second Asura, runs across Viṣṇu's leg along the lower hem of his garment, between his shield and Candra's head to Triśaṅku's shoulder. It divides the lower group from Viṣṇu along the direction of his raised leg.

A′-E = runs through the body of the third Asura and ends in the angle of Triśaṅku's buttocks impinging on the outer pilaster. The last Asura is encased in the outer triangle cut away by this line.

By these parallels of the diagonal the figures in the left lower half of the panel, whose general movements are directed by the diameter B′-B, are given an additional backward tilt, which enhances their expressions of stunned fear.

G′-G = the complementary diagonal is less important. It only marks the direction of Viṣṇu's right upper arm holding the cakra, and connects Śiva's head and hand with the third Asura's head and hand, both being in a similar position.

The diameter D′-D and its parallels determine the transversal sway, the most dynamic feature in the whole composition, the vital counterpart of all the verticals.

D′-D = runs from above the shoulders of the first Asura to the hilt of Viṣṇu's sword, across his hips to the hand in the shield and along the head and shoulder of Triśaṅku, dividing the panel into two distinct fields.

The lower field is, except for Candra, of bigger figures, and the upper field, except for Viṣṇu, is of smaller figures. Its function thus is purely compositional while its upper parallel is eminently dynamic.

E′-C = its upper parallel, from Sūrya's groin to his hand, runs through the full extension of Viṣṇu's chest and his outstretched left arm, which points with the index into the infinite. This powerful straight movement is doubled and enforced by parallel lines of the arm with the śaṅkha and of Brahmā's lotus-throne.
F′-B = from Sūrya's head across Viṣṇu's brow to Jāmbavat's snout.
G′-A = from Śiva's knee along Viṣṇu's cakra and uppermost hand to his mukuṭa.

All these features stress the transversal trend. Sūrya's upper body and Jāmbavat's figure are caught between the same two parallels.

C′-E = below the centre, from belly and seat of the first Asura, through the chest of the second Asura, and the full extension of Candra's body to hands and foot of Triśaṅku.
B′-F = from the knee of the second Asura across Viṣṇu's ankle to the shoulder of the last Asura and Triśaṅku's foot.

The figure of Triśaṅku is contained between the diameter D′-D and this line.

F′-F = the complementary diameter is less marked. It runs from Sūrya's head to the shoulders of the last Asura, in obvious symmetry to D-D′ which runs from Triśaṅku's shoulder to that of the first Asura. It cuts through the hilt of Viṣṇu's mace, the forearm lying approximately along its line, and marks the extension of Candra's legs.
G′-E = from Śiva's shoulder, along Viṣṇu's right arm and shoulder to his chin and along his left forearm with the shield down to Triśaṅku's knee.
H′-D = from Viṣṇu's uppermost right hand through the extension of Jāmbavat's thigh and of Triśaṅku's back. In the figure of Triśaṅku practically all compositional and dynamic lines running from right to left are collected and find their conclusion.

E′-G = from Sūrya's hip down to the groin of the last Asura, without any particular function.
D′-H = from the shoulder of the first to the knee of the last Asura.
C′-A′ = from the knee of the first Asura to Viṣṇu's foot.

INTEGRATION

This composition is of extraordinary complexity. There is no form that has not multiple, subtle relations with all other forms, and no line that is not cunningly interwoven with all other lines. If in spite of this complexity the aspect of the composition is not confusing, it is because out of all eight diameters that are put to use, three only are dominating. They divide the whole relief-field into three clear-cut sections with different forms of action. The first and most prominent movement is the vertical, filling the right side of the panel with a consistent upward trend, firm and self-possessed, Viṣṇu's sustaining power. The second movement is governed by the diameter D′-D and is running across the upper third of the panel from right to left, its main axis being E′-C. It is essentially a centrifugal movement, as it is sweeping across space from the centre to both ends of the panel, Viṣṇu's expanding power. On the right side it is crossed and joined by the vertical ascent, while on the left side it has free sway, reinforced by the third movement in the lower left half of the panel, governed by the diameter C′-C. This is the movement of Viṣṇu's raised leg, his destroying power. Except for the figure of Candra, all other figures in this section have a falling, sinking or recoiling tendency. The Asuras have become powerless under the impact of Viṣṇu's stride. Only the last one offers a kind of resistance by stemming his foot backwards on the ground and by grasping his mace, but even he looks perplexed and undecided.

In this composition not only the oblique lines, but also the verticals are charged with dynamic power. As in other representations of Trivikrama, Viṣṇu's body is placed along the madhya-sūtra, but unlike the others it is strictly vertical and straight without a bend. Reaching from the ground to the top of the panel, growing in width from foot to shoulders and doubled by the enormous vertical bow, his figure has a tremendous upward drive. He is supported by a second vertical ascent, which rises from the body of the second Asura through Viṣṇu's sword and uppermost arm touching heaven, and a third vertical sequence, broader and less severe, formed by the figures of the first Asura, Sūrya and Śiva. The whole right side of the panel is a threefold vertical aspiration, which, in spite of all symmetries shown in the details, is in complete opposition to the left side of the panel, which is entirely made up of transversal oblique stresses with an outgoing, expanding tendency.

While in the other Trivikrama compositions the ascending movement was gathered up at the centre into one single column, it is here, by its threefold repetition, determining the character of the entire right half of the panel. The outgoing movement is, as before, embodied in two parallel obliques jutting out towards the left side, but while in the other images these two parallels are represented by one arm and the striding leg, they are here represented by two arms, one extended with pointed index, and the other, smaller, holding the śaṅkha. The thrust of the leg, taking the diagonal upwards, passes behind the arms and converges into a point with the upper outstretched arm. It gathers up all the outflowing energy and concentrates it into one single point. This position of Viṣṇu's leg is a very essential feature, which changes the character of the entire movement.

In the Śilpa Śāstras it is mentioned, that the foot of Trivikrama should be represented as either raised to the height of the navel or to the height of the forehead. Raising the foot to the height of the navel, would simply mean extending it horizontally. This, however, is rarely found, and in both other panels the foot is raised to the height of the chest. Here, however, it does reach to the height of the head, and thus corresponds to the other alternative mentioned in the Śāstras. Since the Śāstras never explain the deeper reasons for their injunctions, we are left to our own conjectures regarding the meaning of these different positions of the leg. May it be that the foot raised to the height of the navel (or chest) represents Viṣṇu's first step by which he covered the whole earth, and that the foot raised to the height of the head represents the second step by which he reached up to Satyaloka, the abode of Brahmā? And that thus the difference in position would be indicative of a different phase and aspect of the whole event?

Also in other ways this Trivikrama composition differs fundamentally from the two contemplated before. The overpowering sway of the principal figure, which is a characteristic of the two other panels, is here replaced by a much greater equivalence of all form-elements. This is evident above all in the relative equality in size of all the main figures. The figures surrounding Viṣṇu are not background accessories, but are valid actors in the great drama that is unfolding. Viṣṇu, the central figure is dominating, not by towering dimensions or violent movements, but by his rigid verticality and passionless one-pointedness in the midst of an array of moving figures. He stands solemnly erect, as a lofty pillar reaching from the nether worlds of the Asuras up to the worlds of Heaven, and extending on both sides to the ends of the endless universe. In this alone, and not in any dramatic action the all-encompassing nature of his three strides is summed up. He is self-centred, impersonal and aloof. He acts by his spiritual potency rather than by a display of physical energy. In the fanwise spread of his arms he sends out the efflux of his power without effort or exertion. While in the other images his figure is swayed by its own movements, it appears here entirely untouched by action.

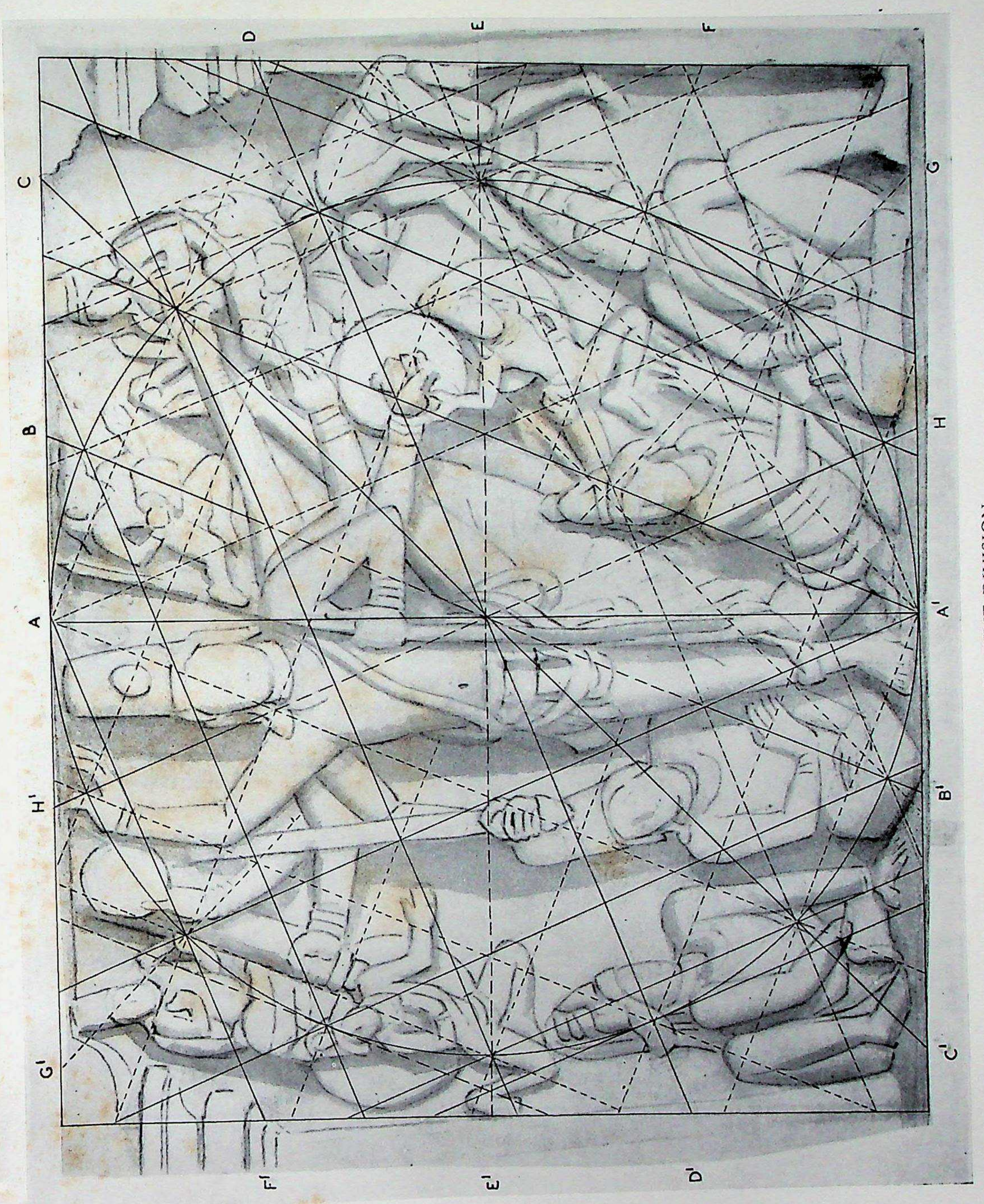
But with all its rigid and detached frontality the figure of Viṣṇu is pulsating with an inwardly contained energy, which is gradually unfolding in the broadening of his form from the foot on the ground to his chest and shoulders. Through the opening of his arms and the thrust of his leg he appears to be growing, soaring and spreading like a tree with its branches. He is the World-pillar and the World-tree in one, and all figures surrounding his majestic presence in the form of a mandala appear to be growing from his hands, nothing but emanations of his greater Self. In this sculpture Viṣṇu recalls to mind his appearance as the great sustaining cosmic power that is extolled in the Vedic Hymns:

> "Through all this world strode Viṣṇu: thrice his
> foot he planted, and the whole
> Was gathered in his footstep's dust".
> Ṛgveda, I. 22.17
>
> "He within whose three wide-extended paces all
> living creatures have their habitation".
> Ṛgveda, I. 155,2
> (transl. by Griffith)

The same vast, impersonal conception that inspired the figure of Viṣṇu, seems to have informed also the entire lay-out of the composition. There are no scenes illustrating the story of the Vāmana-Avatāra, but, setting a wider cosmic stage for Viṣṇu's three strides are the figures of Sun and Moon, of Śiva and Brahmā. They represent the upper regions, Sky and

Heaven, while the four heavy Asuras squatting on the ground represent the nether worlds. But above all there is the division of the entire panel into three different fields of action, dominated by the three different tendencies (guṇas) that constitute the universe. There is the sāttvic, upward aspiring tendency on the right side of the panel, the expanding, rājasic tendency sweeping across, and the downward pull of the dark, tāmasic tendency in the lower left side. One is born out of the other: Out of the earthbound torpidity of the four Asuras squatting below his feet emerges Viṣṇu's movement, soaring upward light and springy like that of a dancer, and out of this goes forth the dynamic movement of transversal expansion, which sweeps away all that has spent its force and causes it to sink back into a death-like state of tāmasic inertia. There is an unending circuit connecting all the three phases, and the eye is led in a circular movement in clockwise direction from one to the other. In the alternation of rise, expansion and disintegration, which broadly correspond to these three fundamental tendencies, the life-current in the manifested world maintains its constant flow. This is brought into visual evidence in the lively flux circulating through all form-elements of this composition, which is not fixed or arrested anywhere except in the central vertical figure of Viṣṇu, and which, of course, stands for the transcendent Principle.

PLATE IX


D
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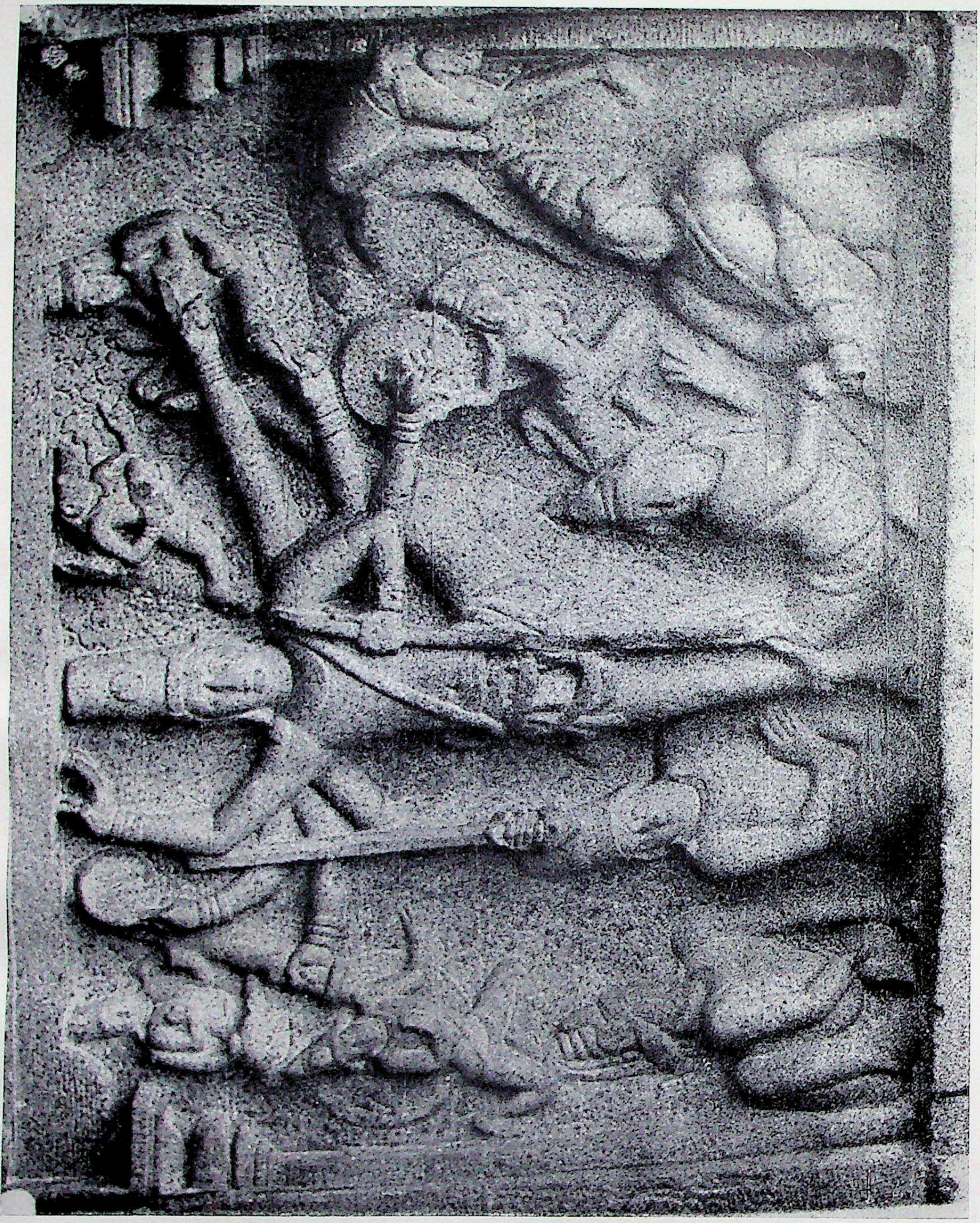
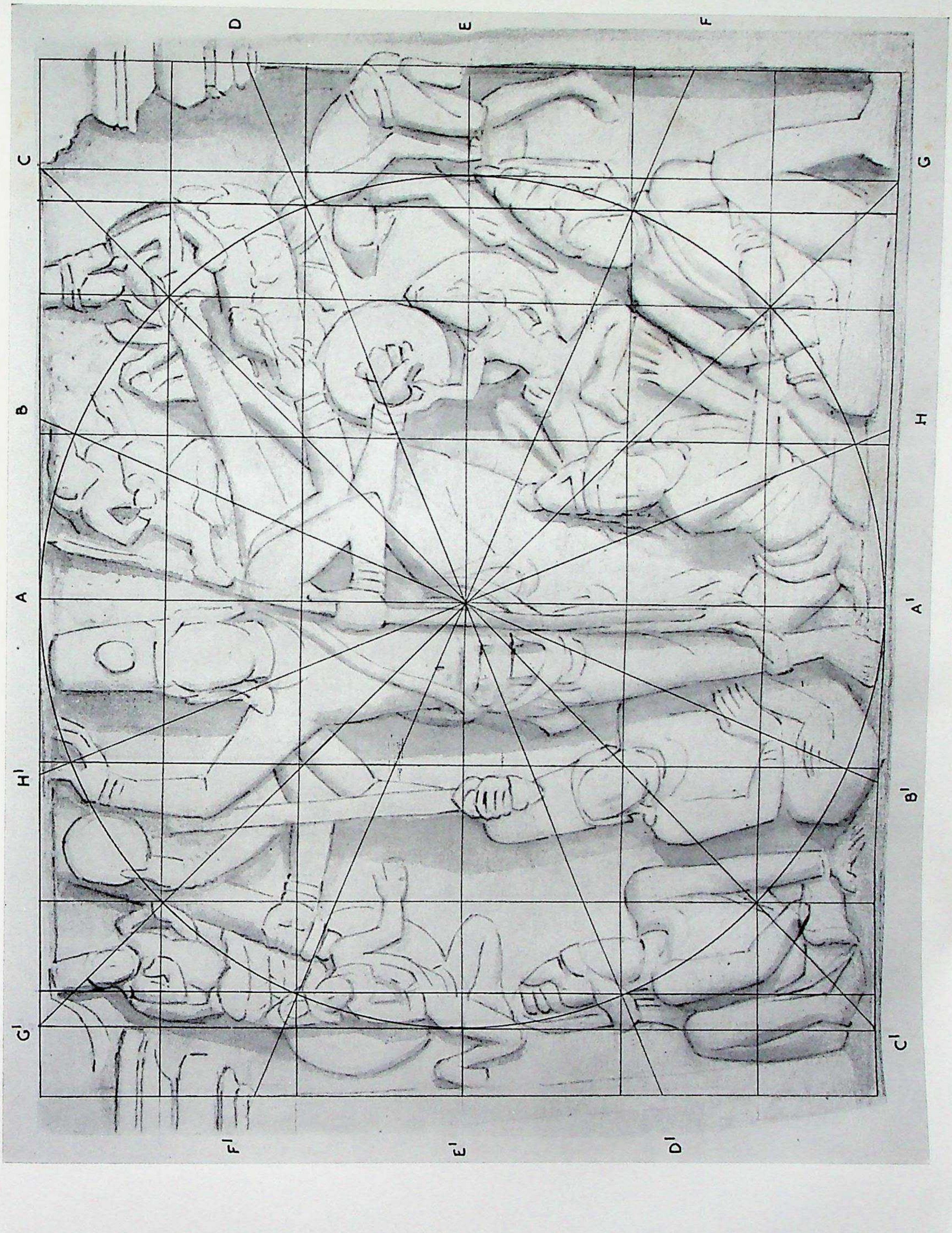
b. TIME DIVISION



VIṢṆU TRIVIKRAMA, MAHĀBALIPURAM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a. SPACE DIVISION

UP State Museum, Lucknow

CHAPTER EIGHT

VARĀHA AVATĀRA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE X

"He (Nārāyaṇa), the lord, concluding that within the waters lay the earth, and being desirous to raise it up, created another form for that purpose: and as in preceding Kalpas, he had assumed the shape of a fish or a tortoise, so, in this he took up the figure of a boar. Having adopted a form composed of the sacrifices of the Vedas, for the preservation of the whole earth, the eternal, supreme and universal soul, the great progenitor of created beings, ... he, the supporter of spiritual and material beings, plunged into the ocean."

"The Goddess Earth, beholding him thus descending to the subterranean regions, bowed in devout adoration and thus glorified the god: Hail to thee, who art all creatures: to thee, the holder of mace and shell, elevate me now from this place, as thou hast upraised me in days of old. From thee I have proceeded, of thee do I consist, as do the skies and all other existing things. Hail to thee, spirit of the supreme spirit: to thee soul of soul: to thee who art discreet and indiscreet matter: who art one with the elements and with time. Thou art the creator of all things, their preserver and their destroyer, in the forms O Lord, of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra, at the seasons of creation, duration and dissolution.

"The auspicious supporter of the world, being thus hymned by the Earth, emitted a low murmuring sound, like the chanting of the Sāmaveda: and the mighty boar, whose eyes were like the fullblown lotus, and whose body, vast as the Nīla mountain, was of the dark colour of the lotus leaves, uplifted upon his ample tusks the Earth from the lowest regions . . . .

(abridged from Viṣṇu Purāṇa, transl. by Wilson, Book I, chapter III).

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE Xa

This composition is, like all others in Cave XIV, held within an upright rectangle. The diameter of the directing circle is equal to the height of the panel. It is divided by eight diameters and the sides of the panel are determined by the second vertical chords on either side.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = along the inner side of Varāha's left upper arm, along the drapery hanging over his left thigh and through the right portion of the Nāga's coil.

H′-B′ = from the end of the right bracket along Varāha's back, from his mane to his calf.

B-H = from the end of the left bracket down along the Devī's left side, as axis through the second Nāga and along the side of the small Nāga behind the coil.

These two vertical chords on either side of the madhya-sūtra hold between them the essential and weightiest parts of the composition, the group of Varāha and Bhūdevī, with exception of their outer arms, then the big coil and the two small Nāgas below Varāha's feet.

G′-C′ and C-G = mark the outer limits of the panel. The interspaces contain the right arms of Varāha, the two standing Nāgas and the two Vidyādharas.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = from the head of the right Nāga across Viṣṇu's elbows along the lower loop of his yajñopavīta and his forearm supporting the Devī, across the head of the smaller and the brow of the bigger left Nāga.

This line divides the lower worlds of the waters from the upper worlds of earth and heaven.

Madhya-bindu = In the recess at Varāha's left elbow, at the junction of the horizontal of his forearm with the vertical of his upper arm. It is a point of intense stress, because from there the entire weight of the Devī is supported.

F′-D = marks the height of Viṣṇu's shoulders and the lower reach of the left Vidyādhara's feet.

G′-C = passes along the line of the right Vidyādhara's body, above Varāha's head, along the Devī's arm and shoulders and the shoulders of the left Vidyādhara.

H′-B = marks the upper limit of the Devī's figure.

The Devī's body is exactly contained between two space-divisions, while her head fills the third division. The body of the left Vidyādhara occupies one space-division and his head and upper arm the next one in the corner along the circle. Varāha's body and upper arms are contained in one space-division and his head in the next. Thus throughout the upper part of the panel all form-elements are placed in strict accordance with horizontal space-divisions. In the centre, both Varāha's left forearm and the yajñopavīta adhere to the madhya-prastha, one lying over and the other below the line. In the lower part of the panel, however, the rhythm is different, and horizontal form-elements are not placed on the lines, but invariably between them. One may say that in the upper part there is a straight rhythm, while in the lower part the rhythm is syncopated.

D′-F = passes from the elbow of the right Nāga across Viṣṇu's legs to the waist of the Nāgarāja, touching the headdress of the small Nāgī.

The interspace holds the raised thigh and the lower right hand of Viṣṇu and the forearms of the two left Nāgas, as horizontal forms.

C′-G = across the legs of the Nāgas, the big coil and Varāha's right shank.
B′-H = along the ground.

In these last two space-divisions only Viṣṇu's foot on the coil and the coil of the smallest Nāgī are horizontal form-elements. All other forms stand across, in an upward slant.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE Xb

Essential diameters: B′-B, H′-H (only its parallels), D′-D and F′-F.

The essential and predominant stress is determined by the diameter B′-B and its parallels which hold sway over the entire composition and control the direction of all important form-elements.

B′-B = runs along the entire front of Varāha from his right foot to his left shoulder and across the Devī upto the bracket.
C′-A = from the feet of the right side Nāga up along the slant of his body and the inner side of Varāha's right arm, up to his eye and to the elbow of Bhūdevī.

The interspace between these two lines contains the whole mighty ascent of Viṣṇu's body from his right foot to his left shoulder and further up to the Devī's arm, shoulder and head.

D′-H′ = from the top of the Nāga's headdress through the hand of Varāha raised with the cakra, along the arm of the Vidyādhara to the edge of the bracket.

The interspace holds the upper part of the Nāga, Viṣṇu's right arms and the back of his head.

A′-C = up through the middle of the coil, along Varāha's left shin, the face and hood of the small Nāga and the back of the Vidyādhara.

The interspace contains the same movement borne upwards in a double parallel sequence, one from the small Nāga below Viṣṇu's feet through the hanging drapery to the legs of the Devī, the other from the ascending parts of the coil through Viṣṇu's left shin to his hand with the cakra and the Vidyādhara above.

H-D = from the right foot of the outer Nāga up along his left side. The interspace contains the backward slant of all three Nāgas looking up at Viṣṇu.

All forms, with exception of the Vidyādharas, participate with their essential features in the direction of the diameter B′-B and are thus parallel amongst themselves. This produces a uniform, powerful upward movement, which is counterbalanced only by a few smaller forms running in the complementary direction, along the parallels of the diameter H′-H.

G′-A′ = marks the slant of Varāha's right forearms and runs from the end of the Vidyādhara to the base of the coil.
F′-B′ = marks the backward slant of the right Nāga's head.
A-G = runs as axis through the upper half of the Devī's body and through the movement of the Nāgarāja's body from his right shoulder to his left hip.
B-F = along the front of the left Vidyādhara. In the interspace the hanging arm of the Devī lies in this direction.

This combined up and downward movement is supported and completed by a cross-trend along the diameter D′-D and its parallels, which marks the forward transmission of stresses and the progression in time of the action depicted.

D′-D = from the shoulder of the right Nāga, along the thumb of Viṣṇu's right lower hand stemmed on the hip to his left hands stretched forward to support the Devī and to hold the cakra, and along the hoods of the Nāga that recoil upon themselves.
E′-C = from the right arms of Varāha to his left shoulder, the waistline of the Devī and the chest of the Vidyādhara.
F′-B = from the cakra to the head of the Devī, along Varāha's head and the arm and shoulders of the Devī.

Between D′-D and F′-B there is a sequence of parallel forms, threaded up one behind the other, through which the dynamic stress is transmitted upwards and forward: from Viṣṇu's right arms to his head and chest, from there to his left arm, to the legs and the hanging arm of the Devī and finally to the Vidyādhara. The main features of this forward thrust are held together between the right forearms of Viṣṇu and the figure of the Devī, which both stand at right angles to this trend. They form a regular rectangle, of which the Devī's head, the cakra, the śaṅkha and Viṣṇu's right lower hand are the corners.

In the lower part of the panel there is a similar transmission of the up- and forward thrust through a sequence of forms. But the forms through which it is transmitted stand to it at an angle of 45 degrees only. They offer less resistance and the movement becomes more fluid.

Between D′-D and C′-E = ascent from the Nāga to Viṣṇu's right leg, the drapery between his legs, his left shin, and to the heads of the two Nāgas, one behind the other.

Between C′-E and B′-F = ascent from the feet of the right Nāga to the right shin of Viṣṇu, the tiny Nāga between his legs, the big coil and Viṣṇu's left foot, the small kneeling Nāga and the body of the Nāgarāja.

The complementary slant along F′-F and its parallels crosses the upward slant along B′-B at right angles. It is also a slant of transmissions and runs from right to left. But it has a downward tendency, as shown by the few forms that follow its trend.

F′-F = runs along Varāha's left forearm holding the Devī, along the shoulders of the small Nāga and the forearms of the Nāgarāja.

In the interspace below this line lies Varāha's raised thigh. It is the most prominent form running in this direction, and it forms a bridge between his right arms, the centre of his body, and the group of Nāgas on the left. In its downward slant the weight of his body is thrown from his right thigh on to his left foot.

E′-G = the lower parallel, passes between head and shoulders of the right Nāga, along the lower outline of Viṣṇu's hand placed on his hip, above his left foot down to the shoulders of the small kneeling Nāga. It connects the shoulder-lines of these two Nāgas with the right hand and left foot of Varāha.

D′-H = runs transversally through Varāha's right shank, the smallest Nāga and the big Nāga-coil. All their bases lie in this direction.

G′-E = the upper parallel, shows the direction of the right Vidyādhara's flight, and connects the culminating points of Varāha's head, his left shoulder, the śaṅkha and the Nāgarāja's hood.

Between this line and the diameter F′-F lies the descent from Viṣṇu's hand with the cakra to his chest and upper arms, the legs of the Devī, the hand holding the śaṅkha and the heads and hoods of the Nāgas.

H′-D = passes between the Devī's neck and head to the legs of the left Vidyādhara. The Devī's right forearm and the shins of the Vidyādhara are conform to this trend.

A-C = shows the inclination of the Devī's crown and of the Vidyādhara's upper arms.

From all this it becomes evident that in the upper part of the panel the most important forms stand perpendicularly to the upward trend from right to left, while in the lower part they stand perpendicularly to the downward trend from right to left. Since a form standing at right angles to any cross-movement offers the strongest resistence and at the same time receives the strongest impulsion, it follows that the greatest stress of Varāha's movement lies upward in the upper half of the panel, and downward in the lower half. By this double thrust he is at the same time raising up the Devī and crushing the Nāgas down into the depths.

His movements, opening from right to left at an angle of 45 degrees lie along two complementary diameters. They are both hinged on Varāha's right hand lying on his hip, which is inscribed exactly between the two lines D′-D and E′-G directing these movements. This hand, although lying flat on the hip and being in itself unconspicuous, fulfils, since it is at the head of two determining space-directions, an important function in the entire form-context.

INTEGRATION

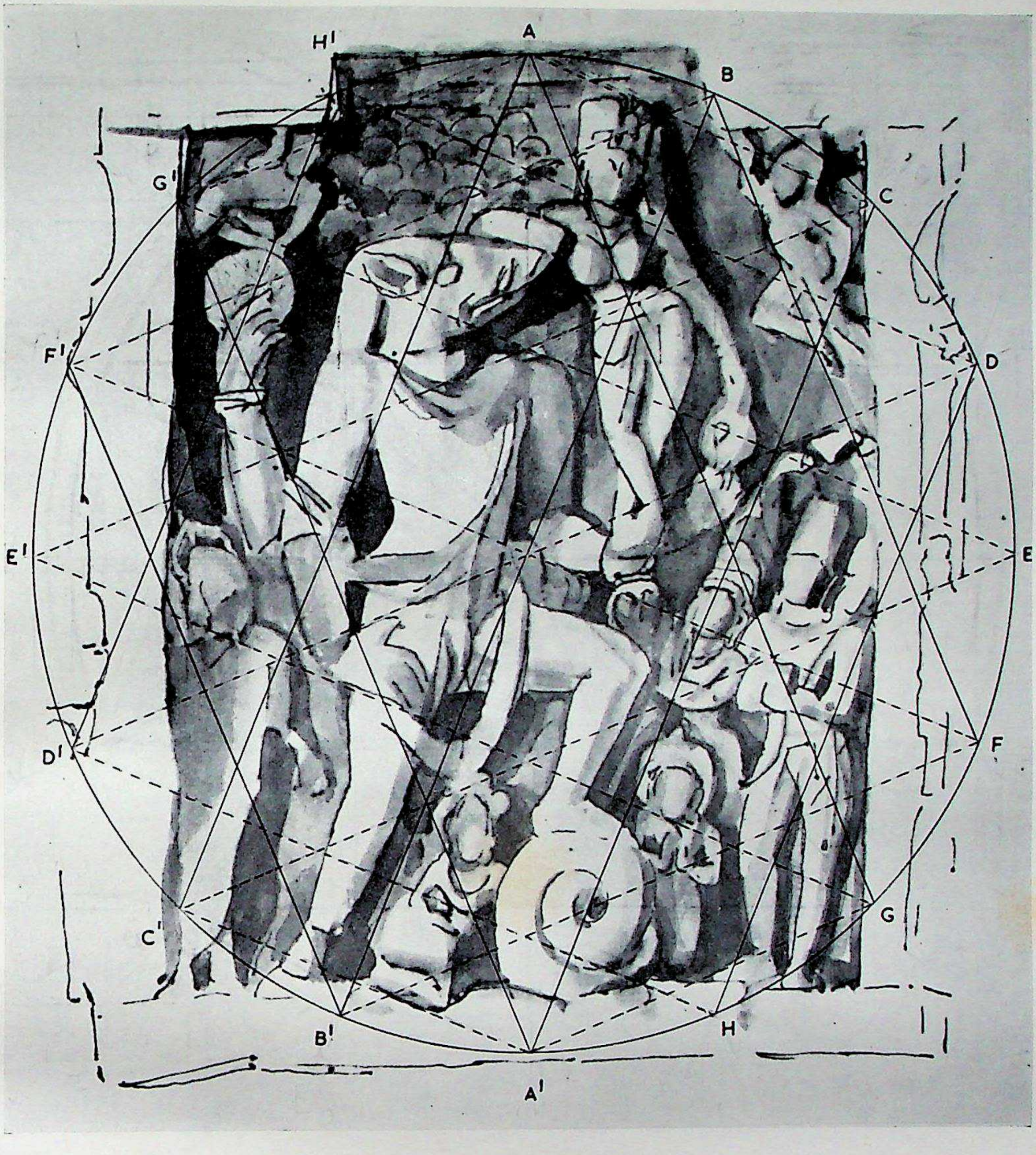
All form-elements that build up the dynamic texture of this composition are found within the four space-directions described. All oblique directions are at work, excepting the diagonals. These do not enter into the context of form or movement, but for one minor single form, the forward pointing thigh of the left Vidyādhara. By the balanced interaction of four different lines of stress, completing and complementing one another, a forceful, yet restrained movement is achieved. There is no violence, no clash anywhere, and the upward surge of Varāha is broad and easy-going. The four parallel sequences that rise along the diameter B′-B are rhythmically punctuated. From the bottom to the top of the panel they are articulated by horizontals on different levels. These arrest the upward movement at certain intervals, so that it developes in consecutive stages. Varāha's foot placed on the coil of the serpent marks the first horizontal level, and his raised thigh represents the second level pause in the upward drive. Further levels are marked one above the other by Varāha's left forearms, by the broad expanse of his shoulders, by the horizontal line of his head, by the right arm and shoulder of the Devī, and finally by her crown, which is actually crowning the composition. On the sides also the shoulders and arms of the Nāgas give some minor horizontal accents.

The massive and broad upward movement, the energy of which is thus compressed into several successive stages, culminates in the slender peak of the Devī's figure. The apex of the movement is reached with her head which, although slightly tilted towards one shoulder, nevertheless stands as a firm and arresting summit. She is, so to speak, riding on the crest of the wave, which from her height suddenly and abruptly falls through her hanging arm down to the Nāgas below. Being the object and end of the entire upheaval, the Devī, in spite of her small size, is the point of convergence of the forces rising upwards from all sides.

The transversal connection of all essential movements joins the events depicted in this composition by a link of causality. Varāha's ponderous drive acts on the Devī, raising her from the nether worlds where she lay submerged. The Devī's sudden emergence from the depths acts on the Nāgas, who fall back and raise their hands in adoration. But the whole drama seems to be rooted in the big spiral coil on which Varāha stems his foot. The form of the spiral is undifferentiated in so far as space-directions are concerned. It includes all without being identified with anyone of them. Lying at the base of the second upward movement, which runs through Varāha's left shin and culminates in the figure of the Devī, it forms the ground in which all movement seems to be anchored, and from which it evolves and grows. Perhaps it implies the undifferentiation of the primordial Waters, from where the Earth, Bhūdevī, arises with all attributes pertaining to actual manifestation: Space, Time and Form.

The upward ascent punctuated by different horizontal levels suggests an upward development, from lower to higher, from inferior to superior states of being. This may refer to the material, vital plane, as well as to the spiritual plane of existence. Bhūdevī, the Earth-Goddess is raised from the Primordial Waters at the beginning of Time, and as such the image has cosmic significance. The lower Waters are the ground of all existence, the potential, undifferentiated Life-force, from which worldly manifestation grows forth.

But worldly forms are always symbols for spiritual states of being, and the legend of Varāha Avatāra is no exception to it. Wilson, in his translation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa says (Book I, Ch. IV. Note p. 59): "The Varāha is described in many Purāṇas as a type (personification) of the ritual of the Vedas. The elevation of the Earth from beneath the Ocean, in this form, was therefore probably at first an allegorical representation of the extrication of the world from a deluge of iniquity, by the rites of religion". As a matter of fact, the Varāha Avatāra is iconographically also represented as a personification of the Vedic Sacrifice. In this acceptation he is without Bhūdevī, in his animal form, as a real boar with no human features, carrying, instead of her, the images of all the gods carved in relief upon his body, the gods whom he supports and nourishes with sacrifices and oblations. But when the religious search was deepened into a striving for inner purification and the exaltation of the Ātman, the God within the human soul, Bhūdevī raised from the dark Waters must have come to stand for a symbol of the Ātman who, from the entanglement in the mire of worldly existence, rises to ever higher and purer levels of consciousness through sacrifice of the self and the efforts of sādhanā. The Devī carries her head victoriously in the region of the clouds, which represents Svārloka, and she is attended and acclaimed by the Vidyādharas, by those pure beings who possess divine knowledge.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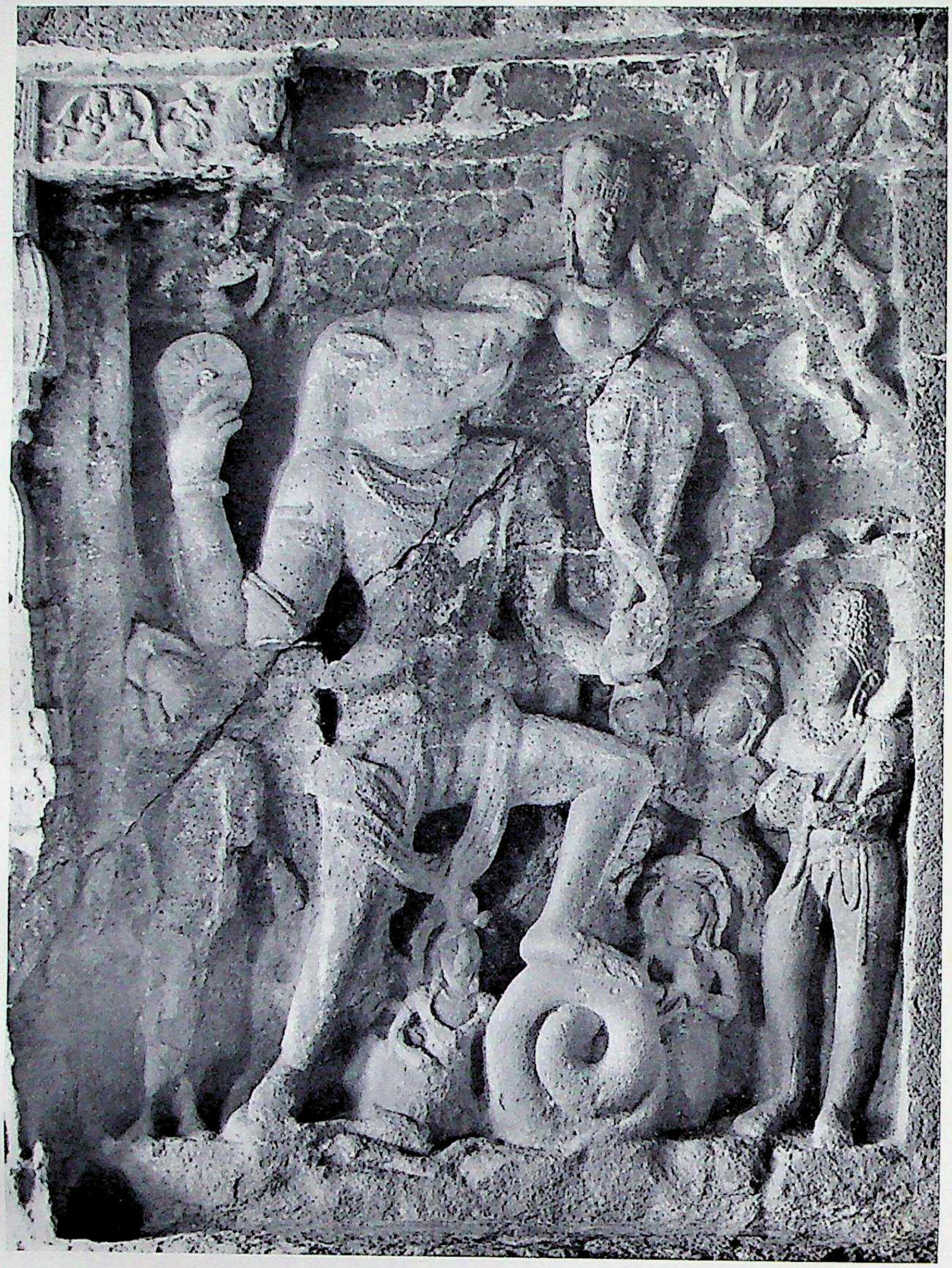
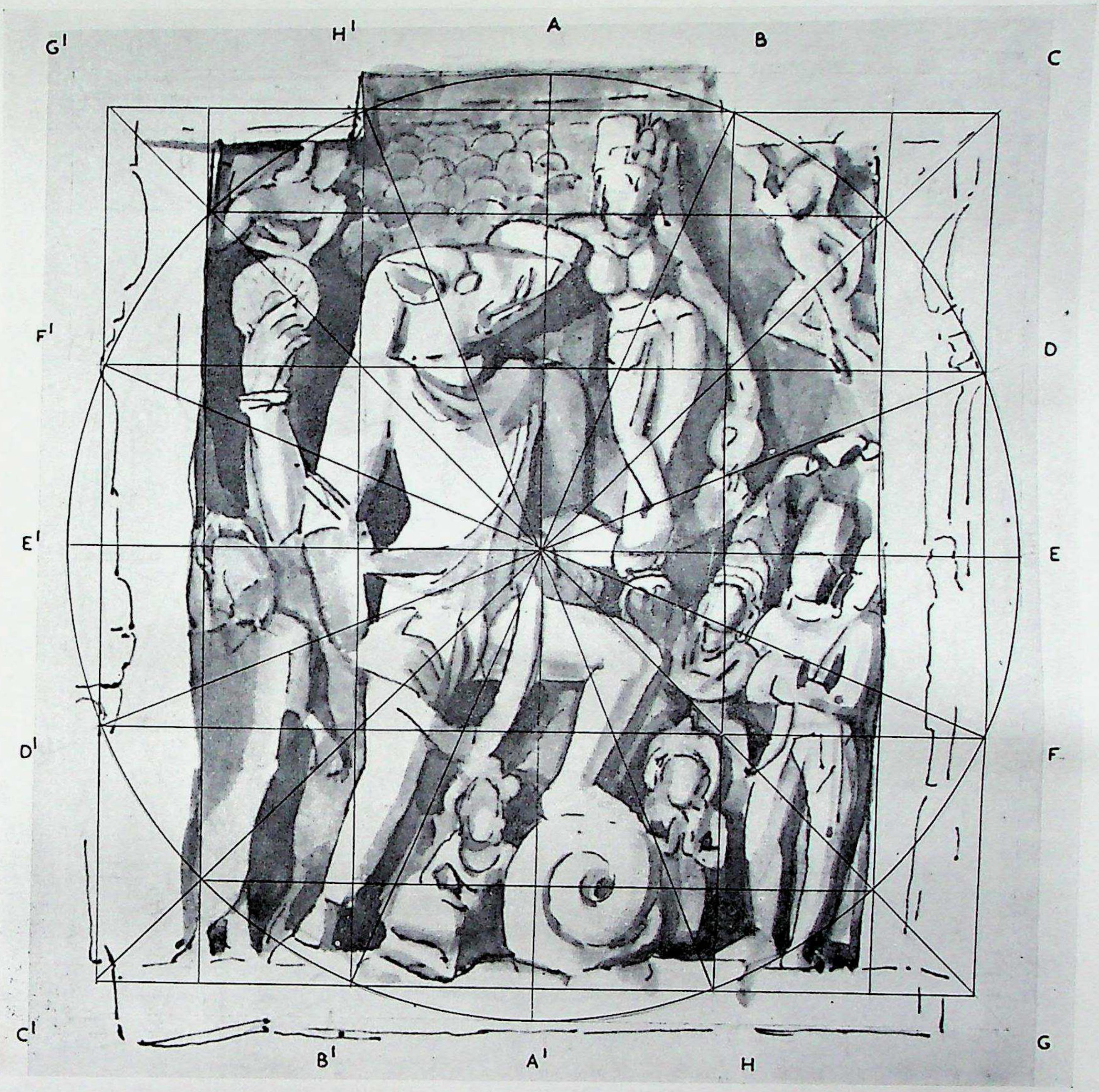
b. TIME DIVISION



VARĀHA AVATĀRA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER NINE

VARĀHA AVATĀRA

BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE III, 6TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XI and XIa

Since this composition is very similar to that in Elūrā, we may dispense with a detailed analysis, but rather point out the subtle differences between the two and their significance.

The relief-field is a very elongated rectangle, but the two figures on the right side-pilaster are also included in the scheme of composition, although they actually belong to the great sculpture of Nārāyaṇa seated on Śeṣanāga that stands at right angles to it. The directing circle does not reach up to the top of the panel, but only to the shoulders of the Vidyādharas and the lower end of the brackets.

The figure of Varāha, instead of being on one side of the madhya-sūtra, is right on it. The madhya-sūtra is the axis of his trunk. It comes down between the two groups of Vidyādharas, through the middle of Varāha's body and between his two legs. The madhya-prastha passes, like in the previous image, along the waistline and the hand of Varāha supporting the Devī. But the madhya-bindu, instead of being at the elbow, is at the navel.

The figures of Varāha and Bhūdevī are kept between the two central vertical interspaces. Only Varāha's right and left raised arms, though still on their outlines, are outside their limits. Also the four Vidyādharas above his head are within this middle space, and so are the Nāgas and the coil below his feet. The two outer vertical interspaces enclose, in symmetrical correspondence, the Nāga on the left side and the camara-bearer on the right. Here ends the panel proper. The next outer divisions hold the pilasters slightly raised above the ground of the panel. The left pilaster is empty, the right one shows a second camara-bearer and below her, squatting on the ground along the circle, another attendant.

The horizontal space-division differs from that in the Elūrā panel in this, that the head of Varāha reaches right up to the horizontal G′-C and that Bhūdevī's head does not rise above, but remains on a level with this. She is much smaller in relation to Varāha than in the other panel. The Vidyādharas have their base on the line of Varāha's head, they fill the interspace above it and reach with their heads well beyond the circle. The camara-bearer on the pillar is measured between the two horizontals above and below the madhya-prastha. Below the madhya-prastha is the region of the Nāgas, shared here with the camara-bearers. The inward curve of the body of the one standing behind Varāha is a compositional counterpart to the bend of the kneeling Nāga on the other side. The squatting attendant on the directing circle reaches into the lowest division, where the foot of Varāha, the Nāga tails and other floating forms mark the horizontal extension of the water-element.

Time Division or Movement

Plate XIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and H′-H

Here, as in Elūrā, the diameter B′-B and its parallels mark the direction of the greatest stress.

B′-B = marks the inner contour of Varāha's right leg and then passes through his upper body to emerge from his left shoulder. Hence it runs alongside the line of the Devī's right arm and head and ends along the forearm of the Vidyādharī.
C′-A = runs along the outer contour of Varāha's right arm and along the back of his head, and further up along the slant of the right Vidyādhara's body.

The entire upward thrust of Varāha's body is channelled between these two lines, and since he stands more in the centre, his right arm also lies inside this space and not outside, as in Elūrā.

D′-H′ = directs the bend of the second camara-bearer's torso.
A′-C = on the left side forms the axis of Varāha's raised shin and runs along his forearm raised with the śaṅkha.

The small Nāga floating between his legs is carried away in the same direction, and so is the kneeling Nāga in front of him, whose upper body is enclosed between this line and the next parallel H-D.

All these upward slanting movements correspond exactly to those in the Elūrā panel, except for the fact that the two main figures are placed more centrally and are more closely knit together. The complementary slant along the diameter H′-H and its parallels is less marked than in

Elūrā, mainly because the Devī here does not follow its line, but keeps herself strictly in the vertical.

H′-H = from the knee of the right Vidyādharī to the mane and shoulder of Varāha and across his body to his raised foot.
G′-A′ = marks the slant of Varāha's right upper forearm, giving a slight backward pull.
F′-B′ = runs through the handle of the outer attendant's camara and down to Varāha's right foot. In the interspace is the backward slant of the first attendant's body and the left outline of the second attendant.
E′-C′ = runs along the right leg of the second attendant and through the slant of the body of the squatting figure.
A-G = on the left side, from the knee of the left Vidyādhara, down along Varāha's left arm to the shoulder of the Nāga. Varāha's left upper arm and the Nāga's legs lie in the interspace and are the strongest accents in this direction.

B-F = marks the outer limit of the Vidyādhara group.

Between the lines C′-A and A-G, Varāha, the Nāgas and the first attendant are enclosed in an upright triangle whose vertex is in the gap between the two groups of Vidyādharas.

The diameter D′-D and its parallels have the same function as in the Elūrā panel. They do not mark the direction of any single form, but they connect vital form-elements in a broad upward slant.

D′-D = ascends from the feet of the second to the shoulder of the first camara-bearer and from there across the wrist of Varāha's right lower hand to the ankles of the Devī.
E′-C = ascends from the breasts of the outer camara-bearer to the shoulder of Varāha, the breasts of the Devī and the śaṅkha.
F′-B = connects the top of the outer camara-bearer's crown with the top of Varāha's mane and runs along the slant of both right Vidyādharas' thighs. Between these two last lines lies the slant of Varāha's muzzle.
C′-E = ascends from the lap of the reclining figure through the bend of Varāha's knee and connects the heads of both Nāgas in its upward trend.
B′-F = runs through the figure crushed under Varāha's foot across the coil to the middle of the outer Nāga's body.

The complementary trend along the diameter F′-F is of a somewhat different nature. It not only connects separate form-elements, but also gives the direction of some of them, especially in the lower part of the panel.

F′-F = from the top of the outer camara-bearer's head, across Varāha's waist and along his left thigh to the head of the Nāga.
E′-G = from the groin of the second to the breast of the first camara-bearer, across Viṣṇu's thigh, on the line of the scarf, to the shoulder of the small Nāgī and the groin of the big Nāga.

Between these two lines lies the strongest downward movement, incorporated in the slant from Varāha's right hip down to his left knee, and in the sequence of his right thigh, left shank and the upper body of the Nāga, swayed sideways by the impact of Viṣṇu's stride. This downward movement is complementary to the upward trend of Varāha's head.

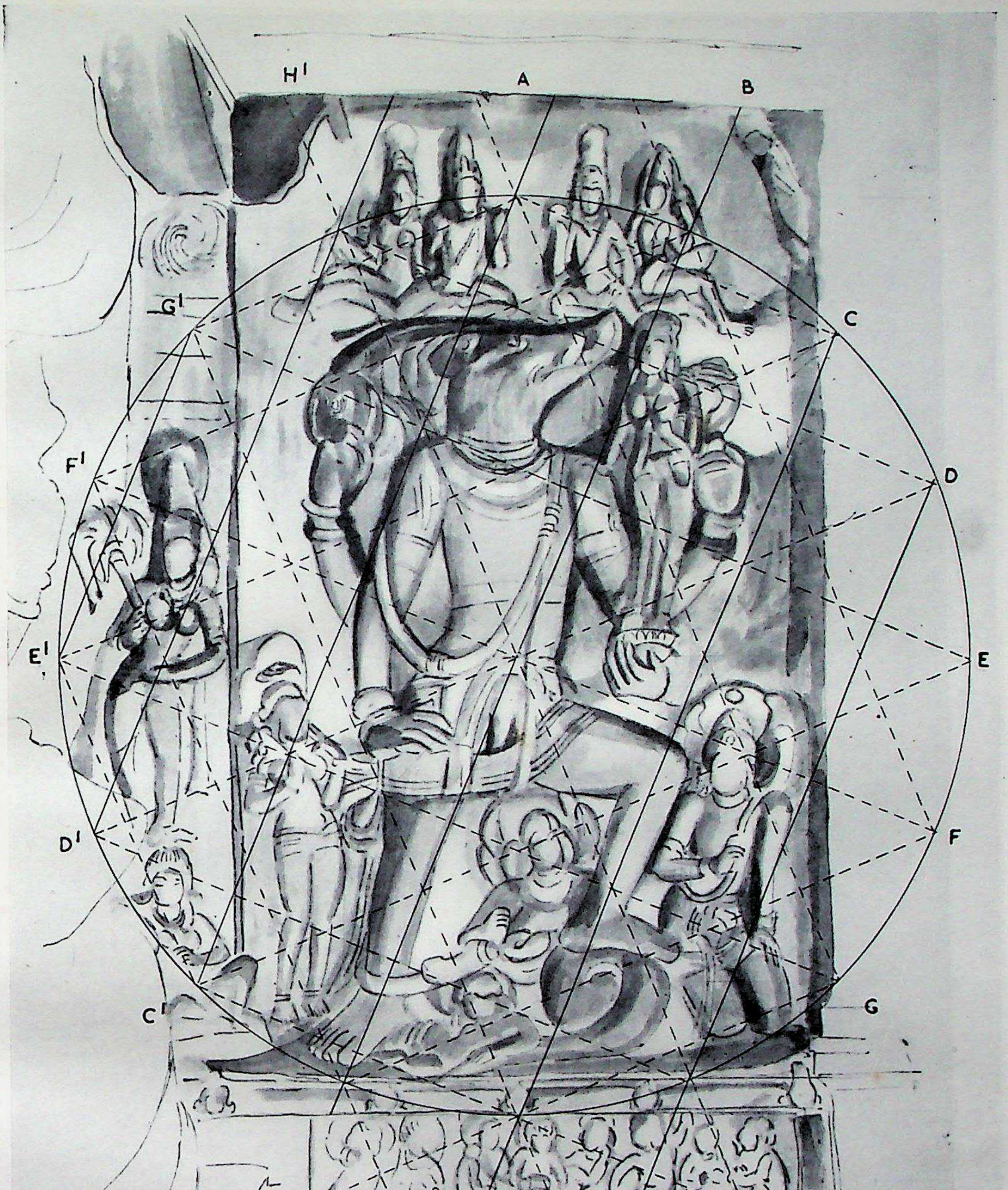
D′-H = from the head of the squatting attendant to the head of the figure lying below Varāha's feet. Varāha's foot pressed on the coil also points in this direction.

Varāha in this panel also shows a double action, one directed upwards and the other downwards. With his upper body, arms, shoulders and head, he is raising Bhūdevī, and with his lower body, hips, legs and feet he is displacing and crushing the Nāgas. In the sideway slant of all the Nāga figures one senses not only their submission, but also the nature of the element that is swaying them in its flow like water-plants. By a curious connivance of nature the texture of the stone up to the middle of the panel shows horizontal undulating layers of different shades, which create the impression that all the figures are standing or floating in water.

INTEGRATION

The texture of this composition is in a certain sense simpler than the Varāha of Elūrā described before. Action is entirely centred in the figure of Varāha, which holds uncontested sway and is not contrasted by any other prominent form or counter-movement. All surrounding figures are not only much smaller in proportion to his, but their attitudes are entirely passive and unconcerned. Bhūdevī herself, reaching with her head only up to the snout of Varāha, does not weigh down his head by resting her arm upon it, nor does she counteract his upward drive by a complementary bend of her body. Standing erect in the vertical and stemming her arm straight on Varāha's shoulder, she falls exactly into line with the upward surge from his waist to his head. The Nāgas do not stand turned towards Varāha with raised hands, they face outwards, quite unresisting, and acquiescently swayed by his stride. The camara-bearer on the pilaster is, in the bend of her body, also drawn into this swaying movement.

While in the Elūrā panel the rescue of Bhūdevī from the depths of the Ocean is represented in act, as a drama in which all figures participate with a life of their own, the surrounding figures here do not enter into action. They are treated more or less as attributes, or symbols, whose only function is to complete and make clear the significance of the main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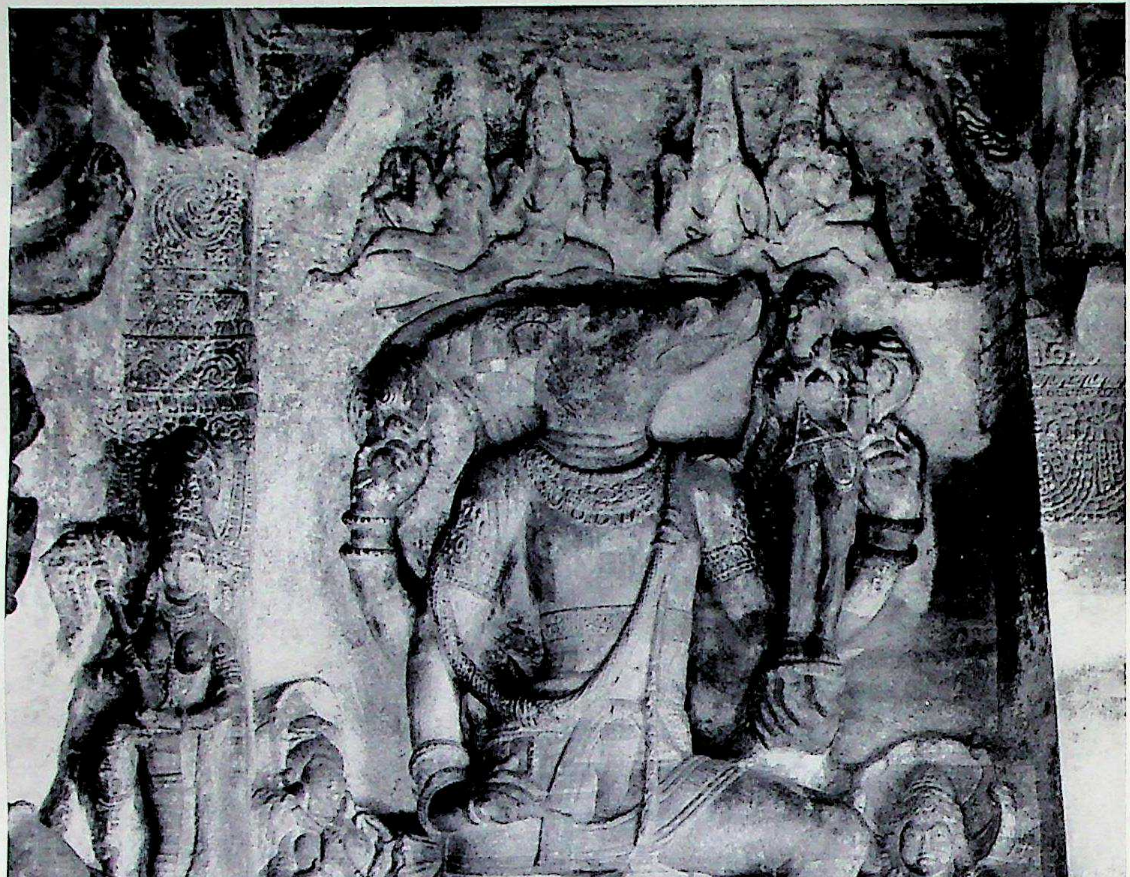
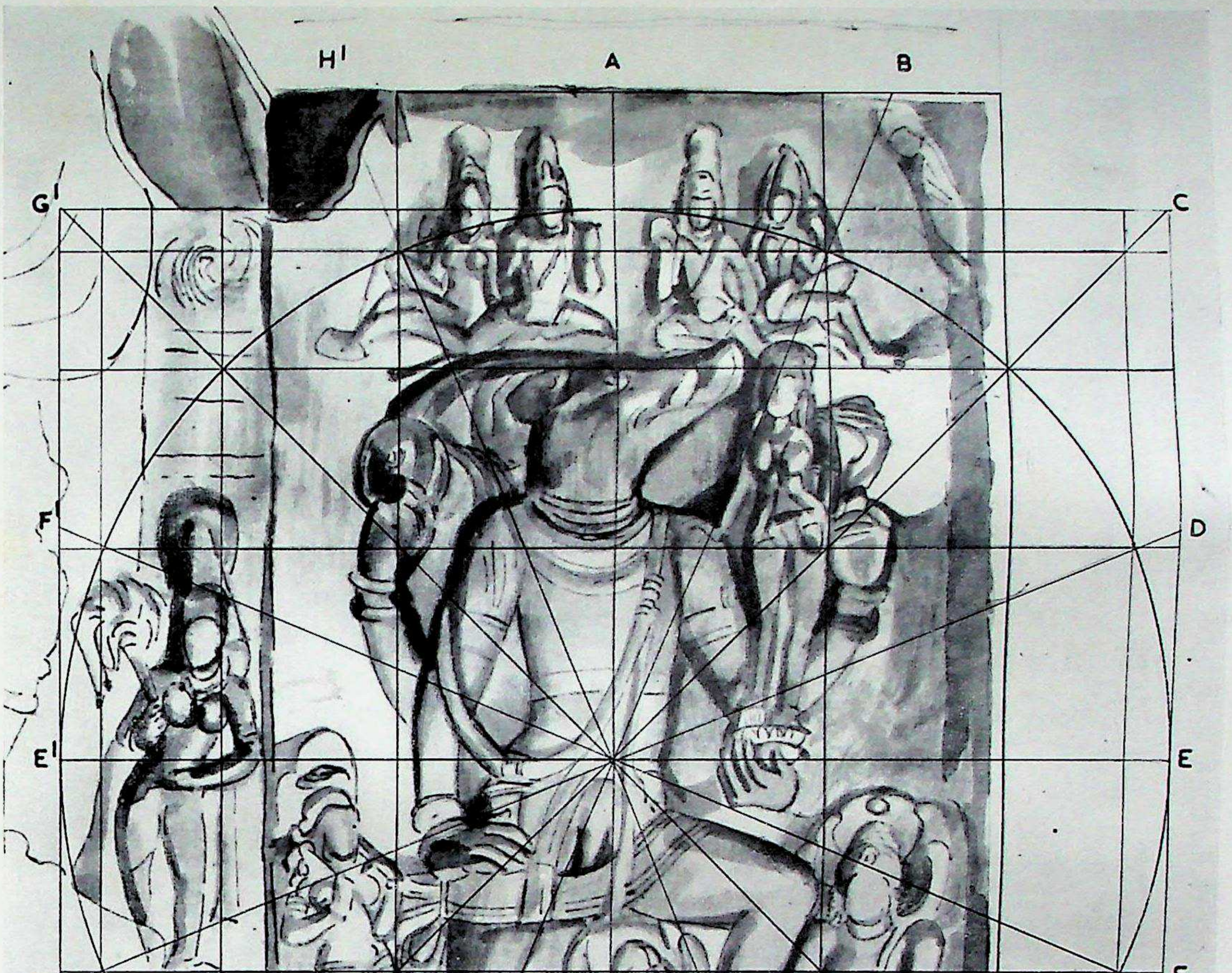


VARĀHA AVATĀRA, BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE III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a. SPACE DIVISION

figure. Therefore the conception of this Varāha comes very close to that of a sthāna-mūrti, that is to say of a freestanding image enclosed within a framework of attending Devatās. Most significant in this respect is the fact that the madhya-bindu of the image does not lie at a point of disruption, as it does in Elūrā, where it is at the bent elbow, but at a central point of balance, on the navel of Varāha. Therefore the image is centred in itself and has an inner stability which makes it independent for its balance from the complementary movements of the surrounding figures. This transfers the emphasis from the dramatic aspect to the symbolical content and gives the sculpture a devotional character alike to that of an image destined to the garbha-gṛha of a temple.

More distinctly even than in the Elūrā panel, the ascending movement of Varāha is articulated into four different levels, one above the other. The lowest level is up to his left foot on the coil, and is filled with slippery, snakelike forms along the ground. The second level reaches up to the height of his thigh and his hand supporting the Devī. This lower half holds the Nāga-world, the Primordial Waters, from where he emerges, and the whole space that it covers is filled with forms from side to side. The third level reaches up to Varāha's shoulder, his outermost hands and the waist of the Devī. The fourth level, the culminating one, is marked by the long horizontal line of Varāha's and Bhūdevī's heads, above which the Vidyādharas are floating. On these two upper levels the forms are collected into one compact mass in the middle of the panel, leaving a vacant space on either side. This is the middle region, the antarikṣa, which, in contrast to the nether worlds, has an atmosphere and breathing space, and in which the sight becomes free to the heavenly regions, where the Vidyādharas, the holders of divine knowledge, dwell. The clear demarcation of the four levels, which collect the upward drive from stage to stage, adds its weight to the inner poise and stability of the main figure. The aspiration from darkness to light, concentrated into a narrow central form-complex and not dispersed over the entire panel, acquires a feeling of great intensity and one-pointedness. In its inner significance it is the striving and the progress of the Ātman through successive, higher and ever higher stages of consciousness, towards unity with the Supreme and towards liberation.

CHAPTER TEN

VARĀHA AVATĀRA

BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE II, 6TH CENT.

PLATE XII

This version of the Varāha Avatāra, although created in the same period, at the same place and on the same fundamental lay-out, is very different in structure and expression. The same essential directions are at work, but the accents are shifted.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XIIa

The panel is an upright rectangle, whose height is equal to the octopartite directing circle and whose sides lie along the second vertical chords of the circle.

The madhya-sūtra runs along the inner outline of Varāha's left arm supporting the Devī, and the madhya-prastha across his hip, along his raised thigh and through the middle of the lotus on which the Devī stands. Their crossing-point, the madhya-bindu, lies at Varāha's elbow, and in this part the scheme is almost identical with that at Elūrā, Cave XIV, except that here the thigh is raised higher and the arm supporting the Devī is resting upon it.

The vertical space-division differs from the two panels described before in that the figures of Varāha and Bhūdevī are not confined between the two verticals B-H and H′-B′, but are spread out across the whole width of the panel. While Varāha's left upper arm marks the central axis, his head and body fill the first interspace to the right and his right leg and arms fill the second interspace. On the left side his snout, his arms and his left shank fill the first interspace, while his forearm raised with the śaṅkha reaches into the second interspace. The Devī stands with her inner outline on the vertical chord B-H, which below runs through the middle of the Nāgarāja.

The horizontal space-division does not, in the lower half, differ much from that in the panel of Cave III, since the first interspace holds Varāha's thighs, his two lower hands and the heads of the Nāgas. The second lower interspace holds Varāha's foot placed on the lotus and the bodies of the Nāgas. The line C′-G delimits the horizontal spread-out of the Nāga-tails, which fill the lowest division.

Above the centre the first horizontal F′-D passes below the shoulders of Varāha, across the wrist of his right hand bearing the cakra and the Devī's thighs and hand. G′-C runs through the head of Varāha, instead of along it, as in the other panels, it marks the upper limits of śaṅkha and cakra, as in Cave III, and the shoulders of the Devī, as at Elūrā. These two space-divisions hold the upper body and face of Varāha and his two raised forearms, as well as the body of the Devī up to the shoulders. The uppermost space-division holds the Devī's head, Varāha's headdress and the four small Vidyādharas in the centre and in the corners. In this panel we see for the first time both the heads of Varāha and the Devī reaching up into the last space-division in a similar oblique slant.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XIIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and F′-F, standing at right angles.

The most important movements in this composition are, as in the other Varāha sculptures, determined by the direction of the diameter B′-B and its parallels. The body of Varāha is, however, not lying with its front on this diameter, as it does in the others, but it is lying with its back on the parallel C′-A. The right arm, which in the other panels is curved inwards onto the hip, is here kept in a straight parallel to the body, doubling its upward movement, between C′-A and D′-H′. In the outermost right corner Varāha's upper hand with the cakra together with the small figure above provide another parallel. In itself the diameter B′-B is not conspicuous, since it does not take any major form-element in its stride. But on the inner side of the next parallel A′-C there is a continuous sequence of forms that again repeats the upward slant of the main figure. This sequence is made up of Varāha's left shank, the small Nāgī, the legs of the Devī, the śaṅkha and the Vidyādharas in the corner. The Nāga King and the small half-figure above his head repeat this movement once more along the chord H-D up to the madhya-prastha. Thus there are five parallel oblique trends running across the panel, two on each side of the main figure, the two most powerful being those through Varāha's body and the sequence through Varāha's left shank and the Devī.

The complementary direction along the diameter H′-H or its parallels hardly comes into evidence, except for minor forms, such as the slant of the Devī's upper body from hip to head along the chord B-F and her right forearm. Thus the movement directed by the diameter B′-B prevails throughout and does not suffer any opposition or check from complementary stresses.

Also the forward displacement of movements, which in the other panels is flowing both upwards and downwards along complementary diameters is here directed entirely downwards along the diameter F′-F and its parallels.

F′-F, crossing Varāha through the armlets of his right arm and through his waistband, runs exactly along the line of junction between his thigh and his forearm down to the top of the Nāgarāja's headdress. While Varāha's left forearm holding the Devī lies on this line, his shoulder and left upper arm are on the parallel chord G′-E, and both arms are kept between the two lines. The long head of Varāha with the extension of his headdress lies along H′-D, the movement being projected further down into the bulge of the Devī's hip. The uppermost parallel A-C marks the descent from the small figure in the centre to the top of the Devī's headdress and the top of the śaṅkha.

Below the centre E′-G runs from Viṣṇu's right hand and his hip-drapery down across his left ankle and along the forearms of the Nāga-pair. Viṣṇu's foot on the lotus pedestal is placed along its direction.

This uniform downward slant is hinged at right angles on to the upward thrust along B′-B, and thus receives from it the maximum possible drive and impetus. From the square and blunt connection of these two single movements, unmitigated by complementary stresses, this image derives its unimpaired dynamism, its more primitive vigour.

The complementary ascending diameter D′-D and its parallels do not appear conspicuous, because no form runs along their direction. Only the curve of Varāha's hip-drapery lies vaguely along the diameter. These lines serve throughout only to connect certain salient points in a time-sequence of cause to effect from right to left in the progress of the movement.

D′-D marks the ascent from Varāha's lower right hand to the elbows of his left arms, E′-C the ascent from his right elbow to his left shoulder, from there to the breasts of the Devī and the śaṅkha by her side. F′-B connects Varāha's hand holding the cakra with his ear and forehead and with the top of the Devī's mukuṭa. In the lower part also there is an ascent in this direction from Varāha's right shank to his left ankle and to the heads of the Nāgas. On the whole these lines which string up the forms lying side by side mark the upward intention and aim of the movement, not yet its accomplishment.

The only stabilizing factor in this composition is the horizontal-vertical cross at the centre, formed by Varāha's left arm and his raised thigh.

INTEGRATION

Since all essential movements of this composition stand to one another at right angles, it looks as if the lines of the Time-division had been found by simply rotating the diagram of the Space-division on the madhyabindu by 22 1/2 degrees, from left to right. All form-elements are spread squarely across the whole panel in a uniform way unknown to the other compositions. Varāha's torso and head, his right upper arm, his two left arms and the Devī's legs form together an oblique rectangle, divided by the diameter B′-B into a square for Varāha and a smaller rectangle for the Devī. A similar rectangle was found in the Varāha composition of Elūrā, but there the rectangle was not directed downwards, but upwards. The Nāgas together with Varāha's left shank form another square, densely filled, and this foursquare design is carried through the entire composition, and into every detail.

As here Varāha's body is not placed in the centre but is drawn back to one side, and his right foot is placed in the right lower corner, he has a wider range for his stride and his movements acquire a far more powerful drive. Further, his head, which in Elūrā and Bādāmi (Cave III) is kept in the horizontal, expressing a quiet assurance of victory, is here bent downwards, following the direction of the arm that is raising Bhūdevī from the Waters. While in the other panels the rescue of Bhūdevī is fully accomplished, Varāha here seems to be still in the midst of his gigantic effort. His knee raised to the height of the arm is sharply bent to push and support the arm that is carrying her weight, and the Devī, instead of standing with head erect conscious of her triumph, is reclining limp and passive on Varāha's snout looking down towards the Nāgas, as if she were exhausted by the effort and not yet quite at home in her new freedom.

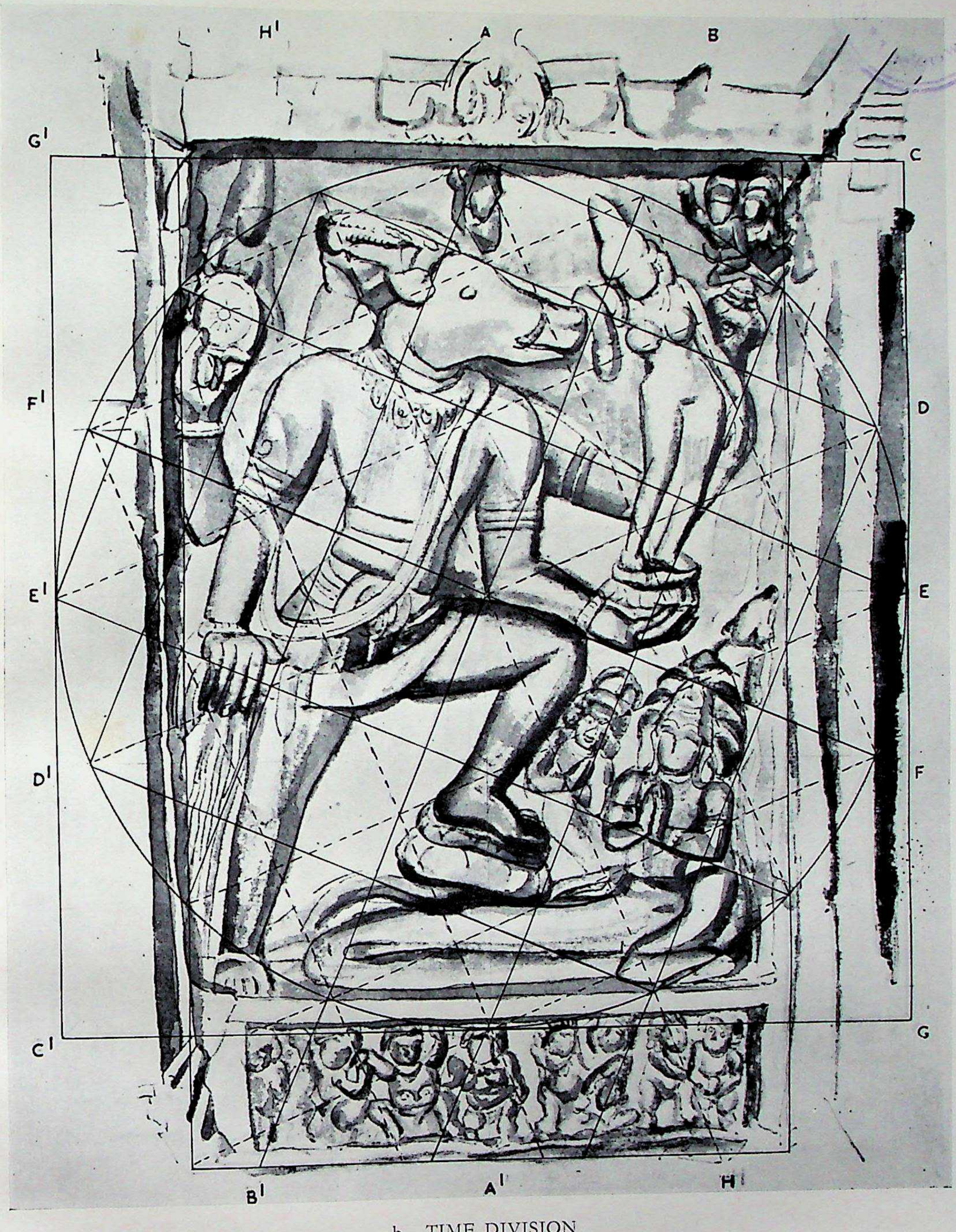
The coiled up tails of the Nāgas, which in the other compositions were a compact stabilising factor, are here uncoiled and the Nāgas, in compliance with the large sweep of the Varāha's stride, spread their tails horizontally across the panel. This may be another way of signifying the horizontal extension of the Waters, but in the context of the composition, it removes obstruction and gives more liberty to Varāha's forward stride. The wide sweep of his movements leaves numerous gaps between the different form-elements, but even these empty spaces are filled with the tremendous energy emanating from his person.

As the dramatic action is emphasized and broadened, the accents on different horizontal levels, except for the tails of the Nāgas, is singularly absent. The all-pervading stress of movement is not contained from inside, but only checked and collected by the outer limits of the panel. It is all concentrated in the figure of Varāha. The Devī appears in a mood of complete surrender. She is as in a dream or a trance, with no will of her own, except that of keeping her balance in her new surroundings. Being raised to the regions of Light by an extraneous force, she is suffering the advent in confident submission. This image is reminiscent of the Paurāṇic text, where Pṛthivī says to Varāha: "I am of thee, upheld by thee, thou art my creator, to thee I fly for refuge: hence, in the universe, Mādhavī (the bride of Mādhava or Viṣṇu) is my designation. Triumph to the essence of all wisdom, to the unchangeable, the imperishable; triumph to the eternal; to the indiscrete, to the essence of discrete things, to him who is both cause and effect, who is the universe, the sinless lord of sacrifice, triumph."

(Viṣṇu Puraṇa, transl. by H. H. Wilson, Book I, Ch. IV)

Although so close together in space and time, and although so very similar in composition, the two interpretations of the Varāha Avatāra in Caves III and II in Bādāmī are entirely different in temperament and expression. In the former the movements are collected into a restrained form-complex, which entirely eschews any dramatic display, but is loaded with an inner, we may almost say, with an introverted tension and tenderness. In the latter, on the contrary, action is exploding and filling the stage with an unrestrained display of dynamic stresses, and the inner tension spent in extraverted physical action. The first is an inner drama, the latter a drama exteriorized in action.

PLATE XII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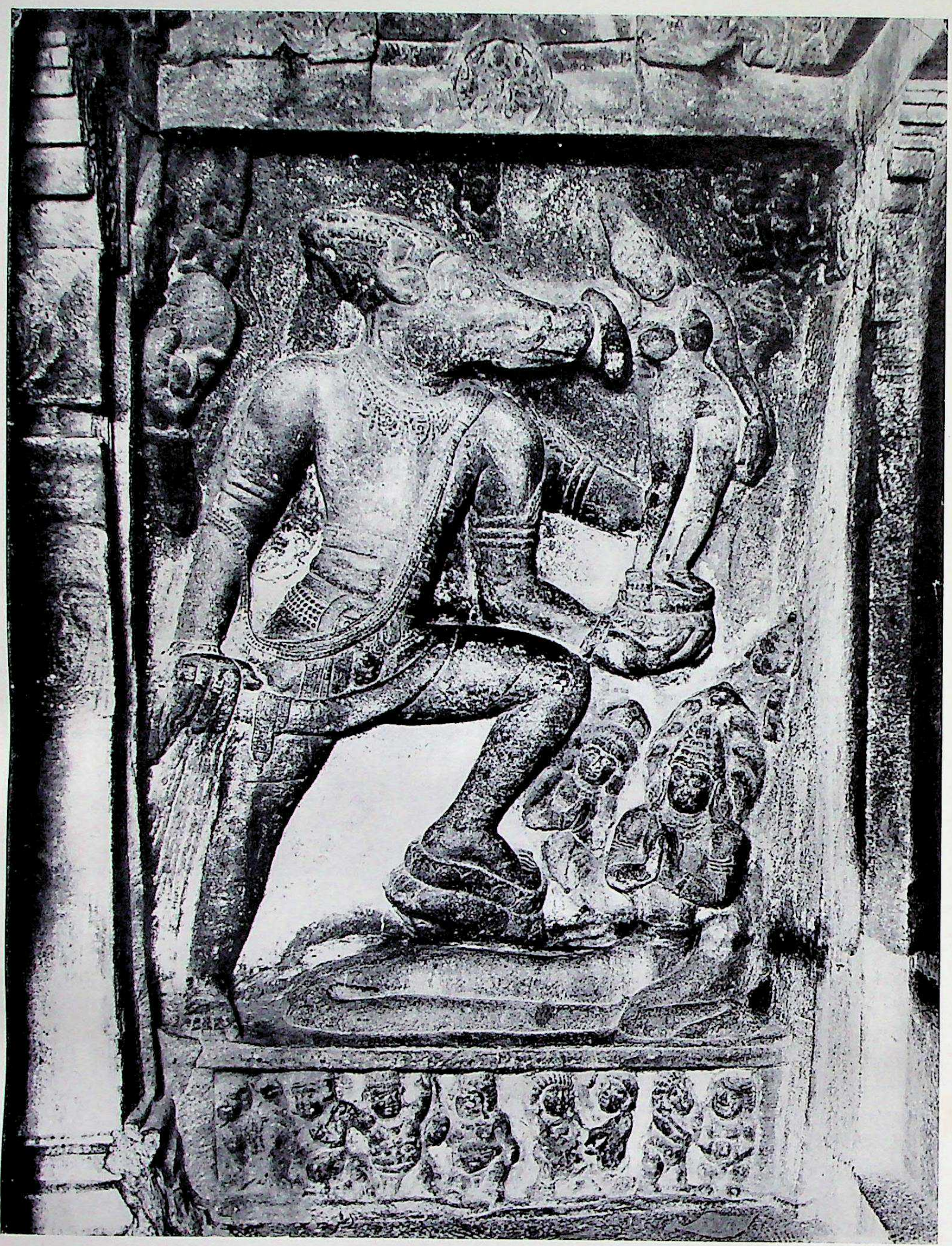
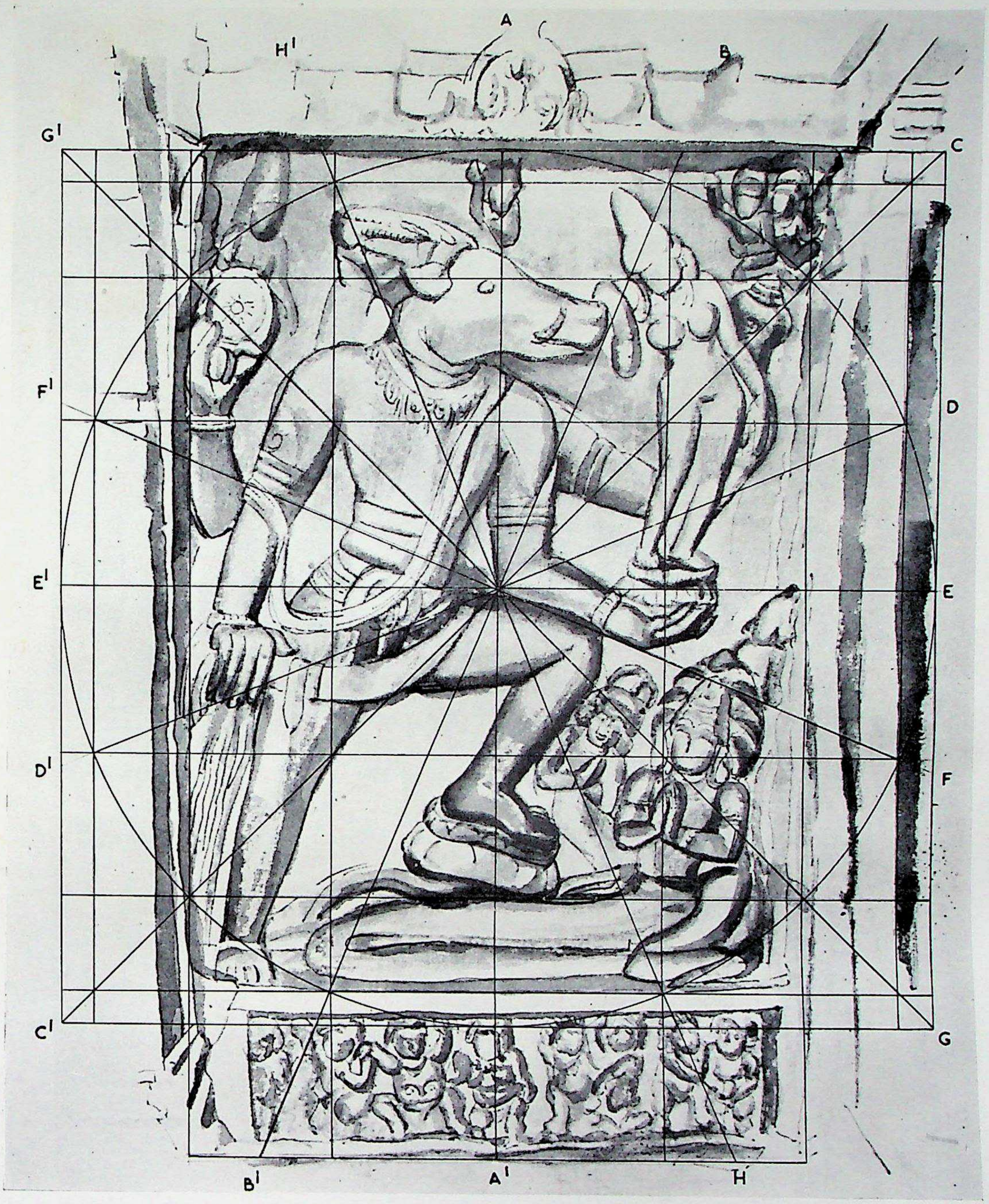
b. TIME DIVISION



VARĀHA AVATĀRA, BĀDĀMĪ, CAVE II


A
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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER ELEVEN

VARĀHA AVATĀRA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XIII

Another image of Varāha Avatāra, which, although six-handed, is laid out on the same principles of composition as the three previous ones. But while the formal build-up is very similar, the interpretation of the subject appears to have a different character.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XIIIa

The composition is placed in a square field. The directing circle is octopartite and is coextensive with the square field. The madhya-sūtra and the madhya-prastha are found by mathematical division. The actual form-complex, however, being an upright rectangle, occupies only its middle space.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the centre of Varāha's body, dividing it into two approximately equivalent masses.

H′-B′ = from the back of Varāha's mukuṭa, along the back of his first right arm and of his thigh down to his foot.
B-H = as axis through the Devī's body, through Varāha's left elbows and knee down to the back of the Nāga's coil.

The two central vertical space-divisions contain the entire body of Varāha up to his head and mukuṭa, but not his outer arms. In the lower parts they hold the small Nāga under Varāha's foot and the coil of the big Nāga.

The next right vertical interspace holds the two outer arms of Varāha, the lower part of his right leg and the Nāgī sitting with folded hands.

The next left interspace contains the Devī's left side, Varāha's raised elbow, his two arms stretched forward and the upper body, head and arm of the Nāga.

The composition practically ends at these second space-divisions. It is closed by a few more or less vertical forms running alongside the second vertical chords, like the raised upper hands of Viṣṇu, the back-lines of both Nāgī and Nāga, the latter stemming his arm perpendicularly on the ground. Only Viṣṇu's hand with the śaṅkha and the coil of the Nāgī project beyond these chords, the first of them rounding the outline in the sense of the enclosing circle on the left and the other running out into the lowest right corner.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = across Viṣṇu's hips and exactly along the horizontal upper outline of his raised thigh.

Madhya-bindu = at Viṣṇu's navel.
F′-D = across Viṣṇu's chest below his shoulders.
G′-C = marks the upper level of Viṣṇu's upper hands, one holding the cakra and the other Bhūdevī, also of the elbow on which Bhūdevī is seated and of Viṣṇu's ear.

The most prominent horizontal forms do not lie on the lines, but between them, the two lowest forearms between the madhya-prastha and F′-D and the shoulder-line between F′-D and G′-C.

The uppermost space-division contains the cakra, the mukuṭa and the upper body of the Devī, all arrayed along the line of the encompassing circle.

D′-F = below the madhya-prastha, from the head of the Nāgī through the ankle of Viṣṇu to the shoulder of the Nāga.

The interspace contains Varāha's right thigh and his bent left leg down to the ankle, both together forming a parallelogram, also his right forearm and hand, whose curve is prolonged into the half-circle of the drapery between his thighs. The head of the Nāga-king also reaches into this space.

C′-G = from the waist of the Nāgī to the waist of the Nāga.

In the interspace below this line the ample coils of Nāga and Nāgī spread out into the horizontal, having a broad, undulating adherence to the ground. Between them are the upward slanting forms of Varāha's right leg and of the smallest Nāgī below his foot.

The horizontal space organisation is summed up in two form-complexes, one in the lower and the other on the upper half, divided by the gap between the raised thigh and the two bent forearms.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XIIIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and D′-D and their parallels.

B′-B = runs along the front of Varāha's body from his foot to his snout. The whole forward slant of his figure lies on this diameter, which carries the arm and the head of the Devī on its point.

C′-A = upward through the figure of the Nāgī, the wrist of Viṣṇu's hand on the hip, his first upper arm, the base of his mukuṭa.

The stressed mass of Varāha's body, which is the most essential feature of the whole panel, is enclosed between this line and the diameter B′-B.

D′-H′ = from Viṣṇu's hand raised with the cakra to the top of his mukuṭa.

The interspace holds his outer arms and parts of the Nāgī in a longitudinal sense, while the mukuṭa stands across at right angles. The hand with the cakra lies on the line.

A′-C = up along the Nāgī below Viṣṇu's foot, along his raised shin, and his left forearm raised towards the Devī.

The almost uninterrupted sequence of these three forms, running upwards, is doubling the slant of Viṣṇu's body.

H-D = along the outer line of the coils, the side and the head of the Nāga.

In the interspace the body of the Nāga with his coils forms a third but shorter parallel. Above him the hand of Varāha holding the śaṅkha is rounding up this movement along the outer circle.

The complementary movements along H′-H pull back and strongly balance the forward sway of Varāha's figure.

H′-H = determines the back-slant of Varāha's right flank and also the backline of his pointed ear.
G′-A′ = gives the direction of his two right forearms, one in the prolongation of the other.
F′-B′ = the slant from head to shoulder of the small Nāgī.
A-G = determines the forward movement of Varāha's left upper arms.
B-F = the forward slant of the Devī's upper body.

Standing at right angles to this complementary movement is the forward displacement of forms along the diameter D′-D and its parallels.

D′-D = runs from the Nāgī's headdress through Varāha's hand on the hip, up, through his waist to the bifurcation between his two lower left arms. The arm holding the śaṅkha follows, somewhat roundly, this line.
E′-C = runs from his right outer elbows through his shoulders to the outstretched left elbow carrying the Devī through a tight sequence of forms, the uppermost left arm lying exactly on the line.

F′-B = connects the hand with the cakra with ear and forehead of Varāha and with the head of the Devī in an ascending line.
C′-E = marks the same ascending progression from the elbow of the small Nāgī through the left ankle of Varāha to the hood of the Nāga.
B′-F = the ascent from the right foot of Varāha across the small Nāgī below his foot and through the length of the Nāgarāja's body up to his shoulder.

Here again a rectangle encloses the space between Viṣṇu's right outer forearms and his left hands with the Devī. It has an ascending tendency as in the Varāha composition of Cave XIV.

This upward and forward impulsion is balanced by the complementary direction along the parallels of the diameter F′-F which have a descending tendency. The diameter itself has no function.

G′-E = the upper parallel marks the descent from the hand holding the cakra to the hand holding the śaṅkha on the other side, across Varāha's right shoulder and his chest.
H′-D = from the top of the mukuṭa all along the head to the point of the snout and then through the Devī's groin, the wrist of Varāha's outer hand to the point of the śaṅkha.

The head with the long mukuṭa is the strongest accent or single element in this direction.

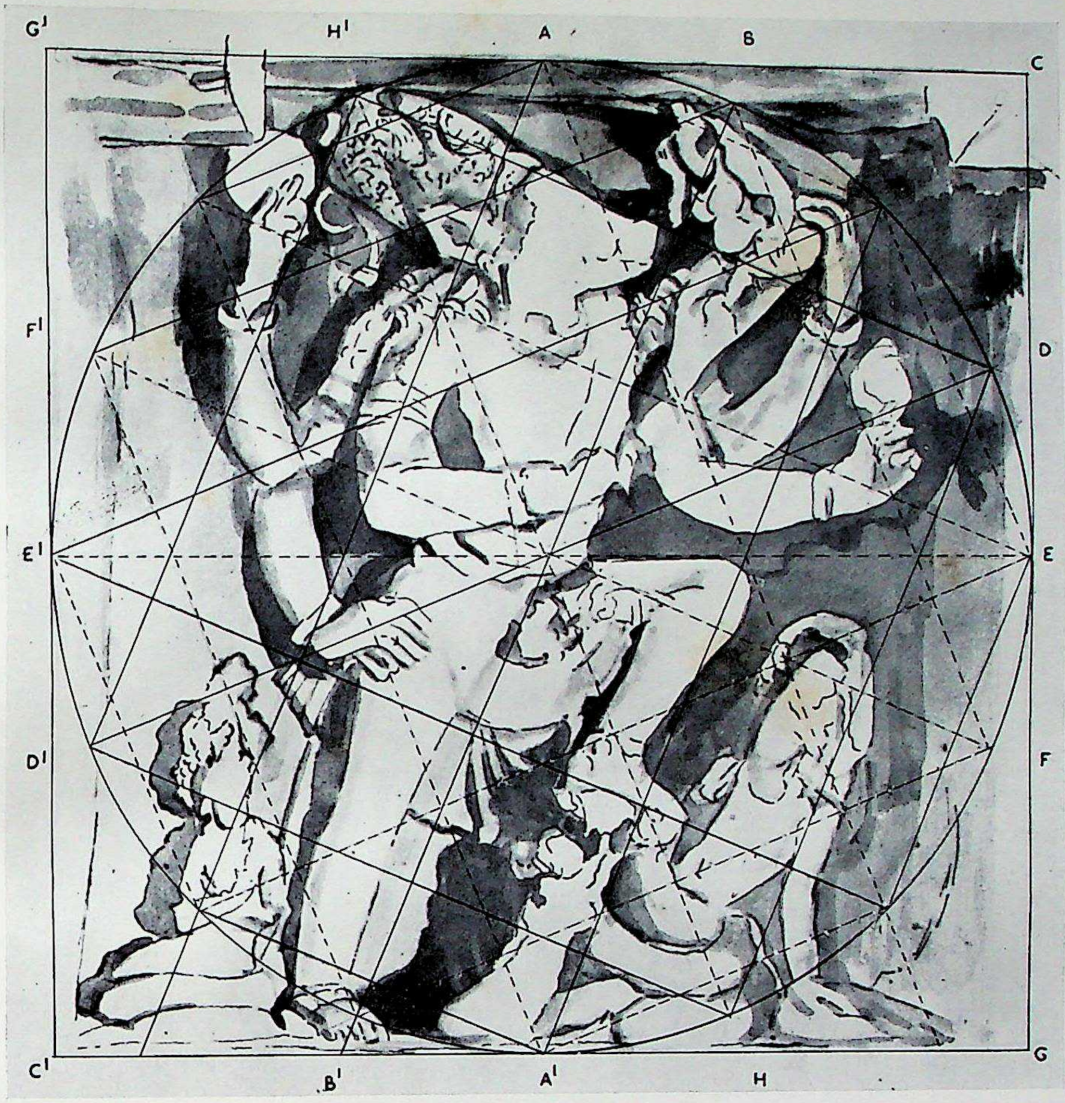
Also the form of the Devī, from her raised hand to the hand of Varāha behind her back gives another accent in the same sense.

E′-G = from Varāha's hand placed on the hip, along the drapery between his legs and the sole of his raised foot, which are all running in this direction.
D′-H = from the shoulder of the Nāgī to the lower coil of the Nāga, it marks the direction of the coil.
C′-A′ = marks the direction of Varāha's right foot.

In this panel the upper part of the diagonal C′-C has a very vital function, as it determines the thrust of Varāha's left arm folded upon itself and supporting the Devī (PLATE XIIIa). It has much more importance than in the Trivikrama figure in the same Cave, where the diagonal marked nothing but a small detail: the arrow held in Viṣṇu's hand.

INTEGRATION

Comparing this panel of the Varāha Avatāra with the three foregoing ones we gain the impression that its action is more springy and sudden than that of the others. In the other images, especially in the first two, a synthesis is achieved, including all phases of the drama, from its beginning to the triumphant end. Here it is one moment in time that is caught, the moment when Bhūdevī, rescued by Varāha, is swinging high out of the waters of the abyss. It is the culminating point of the entire action.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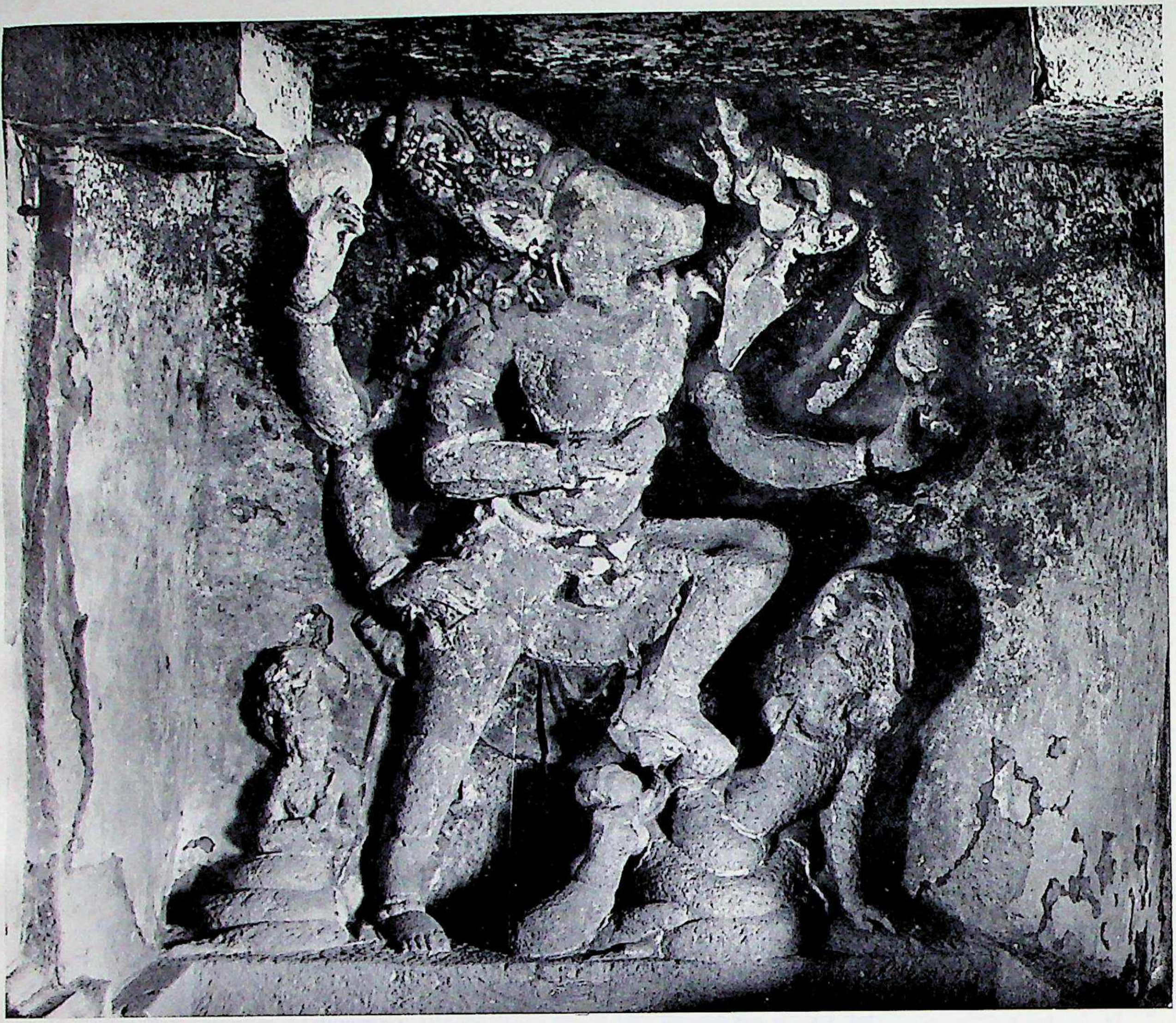
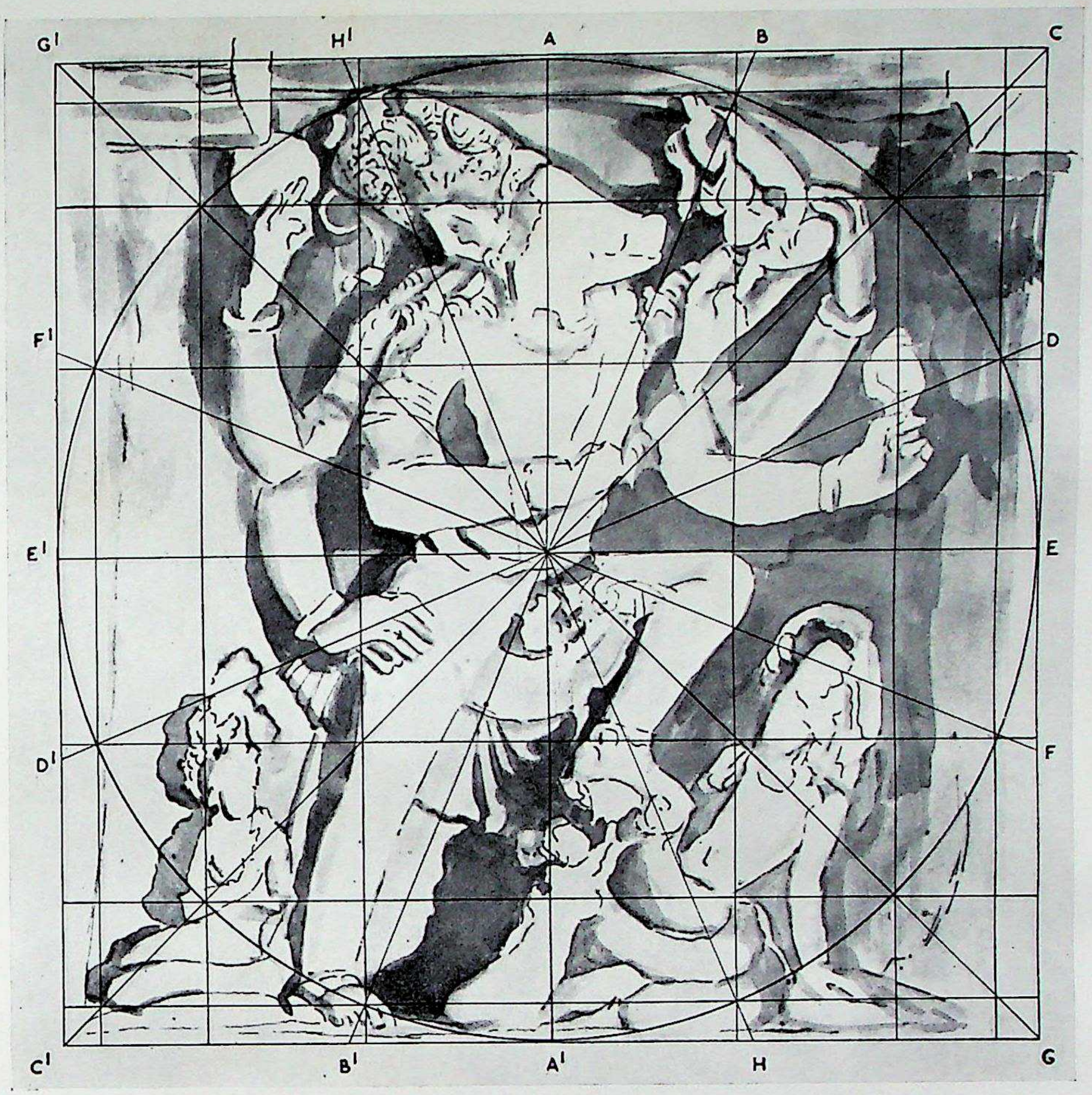
b. TIME DIVISION



VARĀHA AVATĀRA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV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a. SPACE DIVISION

All figures are quivering with excitement and their balance is precarious. In the other compositions the forward thrust of Varāha ends at his left shoulder, from where the arm supporting the Devī is hanging down, but here the thrust is carried up to the left elbow, which is raised high and on which the Devī is seated. Lifted on the slanting point of Varāha's elbow, the Devī could obviously not hold herself on such an inclined surface longer than the inertia of her weight would allow, just a single instant. Everything is of a breathtaking instantaneousness and acts with the force of surprise. The Nāga on the left side is literally "taken aback", he is thrown over by the violent thrust of Varāha and just stays his fall by propping himself with his left hand on the ground. His right hand is raised in surprise or self protection. He has as yet not found time, as in the other images, to recompose himself and to submit to Varāha in humble adoration. The small figure of the Nāgī below Varāha's foot is also completely swayed by his movement and appears to be stretching upward in a desperate effort to reach Bhūdevī and to hold her back. Only the small Nāgī behind Varāha is not thrown off balance by the tremendous upheavel. She remains calm, her hands folded in contemplation. But even she is leaning forward, carried away by the general trend of movement. Placed as she is behind the foot of Varāha, her presence enlarges the expanse covered by his stride and therefore adds force to his action. Also the two right arms of Varāha, thrown backward far more violently than on the previous images, spread out and enlarge considerably the range of the entire movement, and the two outer forearms, forming an arch from hip to head, are by the tension of this arch reinforcing the movement from behind. The impact of the tension of this backward bulging arch is projected into the forward bulging arch of Varāha's left arms and the figure of the Devī. There is between both sides a continuum, a flowing progression of the time-sequence in which the course of the action is rounded up.

From all foregoing observations it can be understood that this image does not, like the other compositions, embrace all phases in the development of a given event, but deliberately picks out its most significant and culminating moment. It represents in a highly dramatic manner the climax, the supreme instant, in which the fruit of action is obtained. It gains by this a kind of palpitating vigour, a vividness and directness not found so strongly in the others. But, by this very gain, it places the whole image on a different level of reference. On account of its instantaneousness it lays minor stress on its timeless significance, in which the beginning, middle and end are brought into one all-comprehensive synthesis. By acquiring a more narrative character, it becomes somewhat more limited in scope, and by becoming more impulsive and naturalistic it loses some of its hieratic and symbolical bearings. I am speaking of shades of difference only. The fundamental ideas remaining the same, they represent what the different temperaments of artists could draw out of these schemes and go to show what infinite possibilities of development lay within the range of such well established basic principles.

Summing up the analysis of these four sculptures of the Varāha Avatāra, which are composed on the same fundamental diagram, we are giving a comparative table of their patterns, to show in what different ways and moods the fundamental scheme has been interpreted. (The vertical-horizontal Space-division is marked in blue.) Common to all these patterns is the direction of Varāha's movement from right to left, and the inclination of his body, together with that of most accompanying figures, along the diameter B'-B and its parallels (marked in green). Their distinguishing features are the following:

Diagram I (*Elūrā, Cave XIV*):

Up- and forward movements along B′-B delicately balanced by complementary trends along the parallels of H′-H (green), cross-trends running upwards from right to left along the diameter D′-D and parallels in the upper half (red) and downwards from right to left along F′-F and parallels in the lower half of the panel (red). Form-disposition asymmetrical, accents on horizontal levels and divisions (blue):

BROAD, POWERFUL, BUT CONTROLLED ACTION

Diagram 2, (*Bādāmī, Cave III*):

Up- and forward movement along B′-B and parallels strongly balanced by complementary trends along H′-H and parallels (green), almost symmetrical disposition of form-elements, strong accent on horizontal levels and divisions, and on vertical, central axis (blue):

RESTRAINED MOVEMENT, SELF-POSSESSED QUIET SOLEMNITY

Diagram 3 (*Bādāmī, Cave II*):

Cross-trends at right angles to the up-and forward movement along B′-B and parallels (green), running downwards from right to left along

DIAGRAMS 1—4

PLATE XIV

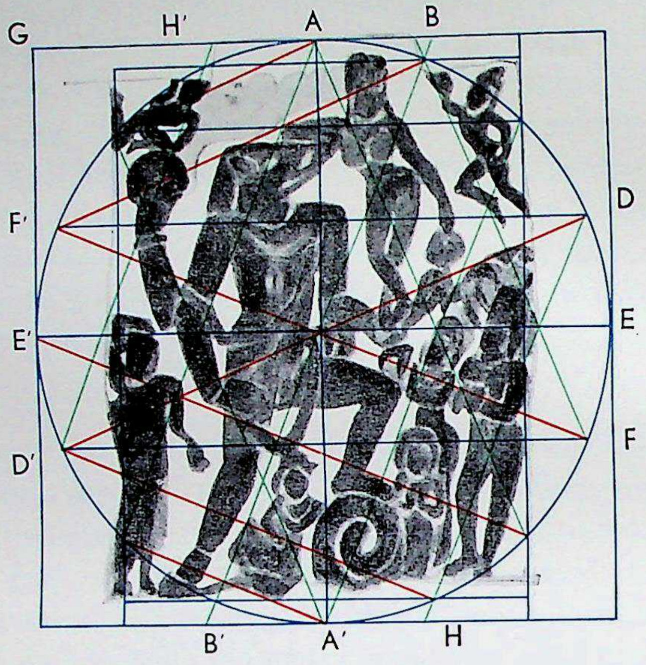
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Diagram 1

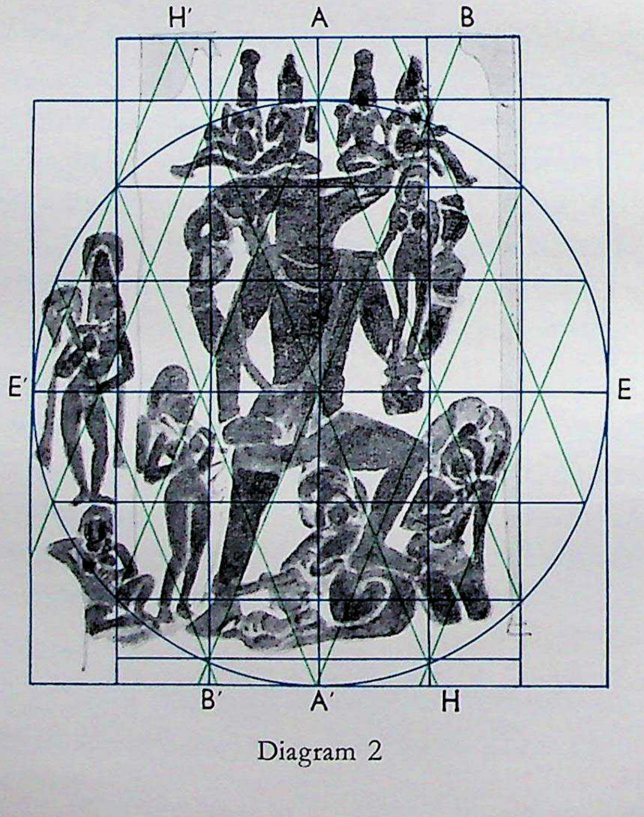


Diagram 2

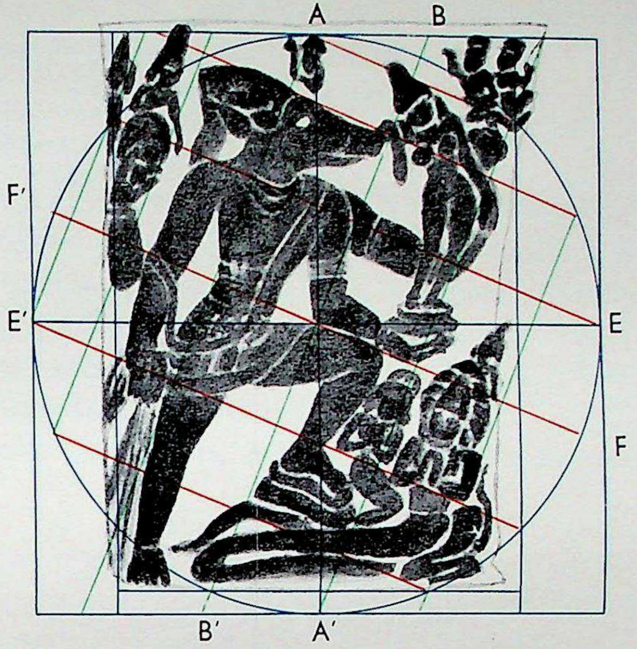
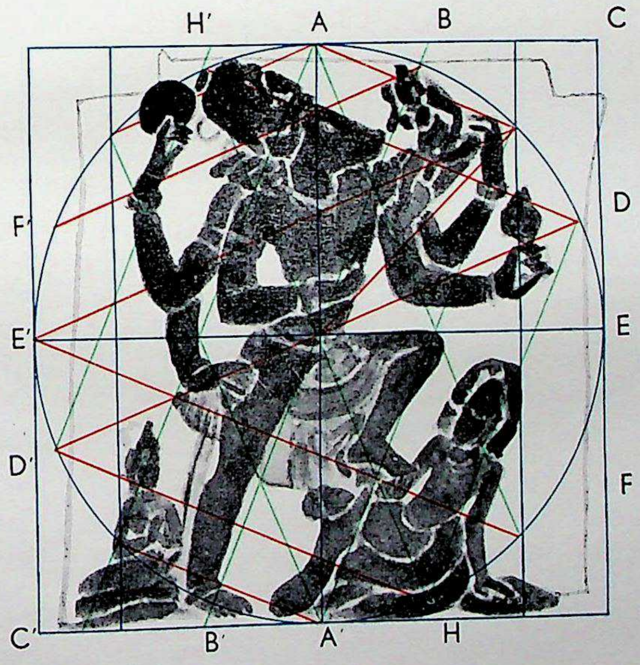


Diagram 3


H′
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C
F′
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F
C′
B′
A′
H

Diagram 4

the diameter F′-F and parallels (red), hardly any complementary movements, no symmetry, no horizontal levels:

INTENSE ONE-POINTED DYNAMISM

Diagram 4 (*Elūrā*, *Cave XV*):

Up-and forward movement along B′-B and parallels slightly balanced by complementary trends along H′-H and two parallels (green), cross-trends running upwards from right to left along D′-D and parallels in the upper half (red), and downwards from right to left along F’-F and parallels in the lower half, and in the uppermost left corner (red) accent on the upper left diagonal(O-C red):

CULMINATION OF SUDDEN ACTION, VICTORIOUS EXULTATION

CHAPTER TWELVE

VARĀHA AVATĀRA

MAHĀBALIPURAM, 7TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XVI

This representation of the Varāha Avatāra differs entirely from those at Elūrā and Bādāmī, in spirit as well as in configuration.

Here Varāha is turned to the right and holds Bhūdevī seated on his knee, with one hand tenderly laid around her hips and with the other clasping her ankles, as if holding a small child. The Nāga world is reduced to the single figure of an adoring Nāga amongst lotus leaves, supporting Varāha's foot on his hoods. The two half-figures of Sūrya and Candra in the two upper corners indicate the cosmic dimensions of the event. But some other figures are added that testify to the ultra-cosmic, spiritual significance of the image. One, the four-armed figure behind Varāha, presumably represents Brahmā. Brahmā is one with Nārāyaṇa and it is he, who, desirous of renewed creation, took the form of Varāha to rescue the Earth. The other figures on both sides are the Yogins, who, witnessing the event from Janaloka, their perpetual abode, thus adored him: "Thou art, O God, there is no other supreme condition but thou. Thou Lord, are the person of Sacrifice; for thy feet are the Vedas, thy tusks are the stake to which the victim is bound; in thy teeth are the offerings: thy mouth is the altar: thy tongue is the fire: and the hairs of thy body are the sacrificial grass. Thine eyes, O omnipotent, are day and night: thy head is the seat of all, the place of Brahmā: thy name is all the hymns of the Vedas: thy nostrils are the oblations: O thou, whose snout is the ladle of oblation: whose deep voice is the chanting of the Sāmaveda: whose body is the hall of sacrifice; whose joints are the different ceremonies: and whose ears have the properties of both voluntary and obligatory rites: do thou who art eternal, who art in size a mountain, be propitious".

Viṣṇu Purāṇa, transl. by H. H. Wilson, Book I, Chapter III.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XVIa

The panel is a horizontal rectangle composed of a central square reaching out to the projecting brackets of the side-pilasters and two additional stripes on either side. The directing circle is coextensive with the central square and is divided by eight diameters. The two lateral figures of the Yogins are outside the circle, integrated with the pilasters and almost forming part of them.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the axis of Varāha's body, between his yajñopavīta and the shin of the Devī down to the back of the Nāga.

H′-B′ = through the axis of the Devī's body down to the front of the Nāga.
B-H = along Varāha's hand raised with the śaṅkha, the elbow of Brahmā and his entire right side.

The interspace between these two lines contains the entire figure of Varāha from foot to crown, less his outer hands, and the main parts of the figures of the Nāga and the Devī.

G′-C′ = down from the side of Sūrya's head and along the front of the Yoginī to the back of her right shank.
C-G = through the centre of Brahmā's mukuṭa and head and down along his left side. Brahmā's figure is enclosed between B-H and this line.
F′-D′ = from the outer side of Sūrya's halo down along the front-line of the standing Yogin, between him and the Yoginī.
D-F = from the back of Candra's head down along the front of the Yogin on the left side, on the line between him and Brahmā's arm.
The vertical tangents on the circle form the axes of the Yogins' figures.

The vertical is predominant throughout the whole panel, as a matter of fact the panel is built up of a juxtaposition of vertical form-elements, some smaller and some bigger, some single and some aggregate, rising from and to different horizontal levels. The central space is dominated by the big vertical of Varāha's figure reaching from bottom to top of the panel. By his side is the smaller vertical of Brahmā reaching only up to the height of Varāha's ear, crowned above by the figure of Candra. On the right side the Yoginī reaches only a little above the middle-line, but the vertical is continued by her arm and stick up to the arms of Varāha and the figure of Sūrya. On both sides the Yogins, seen from the back, are addorsed to the pilasters and half merged into them.

Horizontals

The horizontal space divisions are unconspicuous and merely have the function of articulating the vertical divisions with small limiting lines.

Madhya prastha = crosses along Varāha's hip-bands, along the Yoginī's shoulders and through the waistlines of Brahmā and the two outer Yogins.

Madhya-bindu = lies at a point corresponding to Varāha's mūlādhāra cakra, the Earth-centre. This point is in the middle of a knot formed by the hand of Varāha, his wristlet, his waist-band and by the shin, anklet and foot of Bhūdevī, three vertical and three horizontal forms interwoven.

F′-D = passes from the ear of the right side Yogin between thigh and arm of Bhūdevī to the ears of Brahmā and of the left side Yogin. In the interspace Bhūdevī's thigh and the shoulders of Brahmā and the two Yogins give the most important horizontal levels.
G′-C = passes from bracket to bracket through the ears of Bhūdevī and Varāha and marks the height of Brahmā's crown.
H′-B = marks the top of Bhūdevī's mukuṭa.

Below the madhya-prastha horizontal divisions are even less marked.

D′-F = marks the waistline of the Yoginī.
C′-G = marks the elbow of the Nāga.
B′-H = marks the limit of the feet of all figures and the ground on which they stand.

TIME DIVISION OF MOVEMENT

PLATE XVIb

Essential diameters: B′-B and H′-H

The juxtaposition and combination of vertical forms of various sizes and strength, by which this composition is determined, is modulated and connected by oblique and diagonal trends distributed across the panel. These, however, never assume the dynamic character found in previous images of Varāha Avatāra. They only bring a kind of flux into the almost static composition, circulating within its confines without disturbing its inner balance. Since none of the oblique diameters is holding sway over the others, their complementary trends produce only slight, symmetrically balanced deflections without violence or stress.

B-B′ = marks the slant of the Nāga's upper arm and of Varāha's left flank.
A′-C = marks the slant of Brahmā's upper body and head and of Candra's head. In the interspace only Brahmā's and Viṣṇu's arms run approximately in this direction.

H-D = marks the slant of Brahmā's left flank and of the Yogin's jaṭā. Brahmā's entire upper body is taken between these two last lines, and Candra's figure also conforms to this trend.
G-E = all along the line of the Yogin's arm. This and Brahmā's left arms fill the interspace.

This trend which is prominent on the left side of the panel is less so on the right side.

C′-A = runs along the mass of lotus-leaves and Nāga-hoods up to the front of Varāha's head. The interspace is filled below with the front of the Nāga and above with Viṣṇu's chest and head.
D′-H′ = through the back of the Yoginī up along the head and mukuṭa of Bhūdevī.
E′-G′ = along the inclined head of the Yogin up to the hands of Sūrya and the cakra of Viṣṇu.

The trend of the complementary diameter H-H′ is on the contrary, more marked on the right side of the panel.

H-H′ = in its upper half marks a dividing line between Varāha and Bhūdevī.
A′-G′ = through the Nāga along his forward slant and up along Varāha's two outer hands to hands and head of Sūrya.
B′-F′ = through the upward extension of the lotus-leaf, the arm and head of the Yoginī to the head of the Yogin.
C′-E′ = from the foot of the Yoginī up along the arm of the Yogin.
G-A = from Brahmā's left foot, across his hip and elbow to the crown of Varāha.
F-B = from the calf and hand of the Yogin to Brahmā's neck and up along the outline of Varāha's hand, śaṅkha and mukuṭa.
E-C = from the waist of the Yogin up to the top of Brahmā's mukuṭa and the hands of Candra.

On the whole the slant of the parallels of H′-H is more effective on the right side of Varāha, while the slant of the parallels of B′-B is more effective on the left side. Together they form a system of inverted triangles, one inside the other, which build up the composition in symmetrical correspondences. The innermost triangle H′-O-B delimited by the front of the Devī and the left flank of Varāha contains Varāha's erect upper body and head in a central position, as the innermost core of the composition. The next inverted triangle, from A′ to G′ and C, to the figures of Sūrya and Candra, is taking in the rest of Varāha's body and the figure of the Devī, establishing them in the centre as the two dominant figures. This triangle is limited on one side by the right flank of Brahmā and Candra, and on the other by the sequence, although at a little distance, of the Nāga, the Yoginī and the Yogin. On both sides these figures give an outline slanting outwards and open a triangular cleft from which the group of Varāha and the Devī is emerging. This figure of a triangle opening upwards illustrates in the most simple and direct way the emergence of the two main figures, from a dark and narrow depth to the vastness of space and light.

A certain importance also attaches to the transversal oblique diameters F-F′, D′-D and their parallels.

F-F′ = runs up from the lowest limit of the left Yogin's hand to the hands of Brahmā, connecting them along the line of his girdle, then to the lowest left and right hands of Varāha, through his belt and knee to the head of the right Yogin.
E-G′ = from the waist of the left Yogin across Brahmā's chest to Varāha's muzzle, the Devī's shoulder, the wrist of the hand with the cakra and the shoulders of Sūrya. It passes above the raised right hand of Brahmā and the raised right hand of the Devī, which both have similar gestures.
D-H′ = marks the ascent from the head of the Yogin on the left to the head of Brahmā, the hand of Viṣṇu with the śaṅkha, the brow of Viṣṇu, the crown of the Devī, and the top of the cakra.
C-A = connects the top of the Yogin's jaṭā with the top of Brahmā's mukuṭa and the top of the śaṅkha.
G-E′ = from the foot of the left Yogin across to the hoods of the Nāga and the waist of the right Yogin.
H-E′ = from Varāha's foot to the lotus-leaves and the thigh of the Yoginī.
A′-D′ = up along the slanting line of the lotus leaves below the Nāga and the Yoginī.

All these parallels mark an ascent from the left side of the panel to the right, by a regular rise in the level of all figures placed side by side, from the Yogin on the left to Brahmā, from Brahmā to Varāha, from Varāha to Bhūmidevī and from her to Sūrya. Above the diameter F-F′ these form a compact uninterrupted array, while below that diameter the figures are split up into three groups, one in the centre with Varāha's leg and the Nāga, one to the right with Yoginī and Yogin, and one to the left with the legs of Brahmā and the Yogin. Nevertheless the ascending movement is visible also here, in the first interspace from the legs of the left Yogin, Brahmā and Varāha to heads and shoulders of Yoginī and Yogin, in the second from the feet of Brahmā to the shin of Varāha, the head and shoulders of the Nāga and the middle of Yoginī and Yogin. In the last interspace from the lotus-leaves to the legs of Yoginī and Yogin.

The complementary movement along the diameter D-D′ and its parallels is weaker and intermittent, and seems to have a downward tendency in the lower part of the panel and an upward tendency in the upper part.

D-D′ = from the head of the Yogin on the left through the shoulders of

Brahmā, along the left forearm of Varāha and the hoods of the Nāga down to the elbow and waist of the Yoginī.

Below this line a descending sequence appears to run from Brahmā's torso to Varāha's thigh, the head of the Nāga and the thigh of the Yoginī, and again from the hip of the left Yogin to Brahmā's thighs, Varāha's shank and the body of the Nāga in the lotus-cluster. It is especially the Nāga that marks this downward trend. Above the diameter the movement appears to be ascending from the torso of the Yoginī who points her hands towards Viṣṇu, through the middle of Viṣṇu to the head of Brahmā, and again from the shoulder of the right Yogin to the torso of the Devī and the long head of Varāha. But all these forms are only loosely connected and do not form a consistent sequence as those in the ascent from left to right. On the whole the ascending movement predominates, embodying an action, which begins in the dephts and extends upwards.

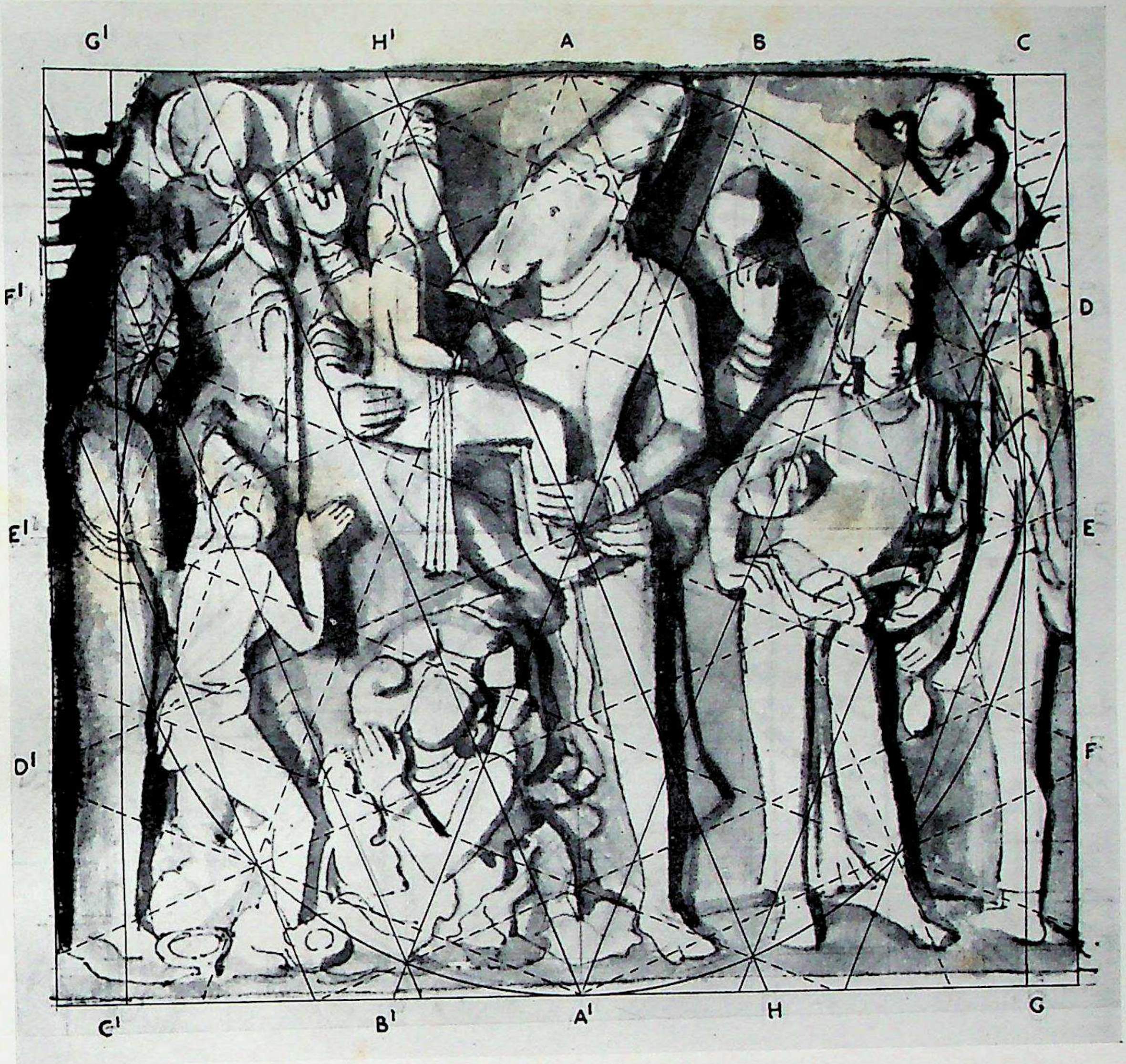
These two complementary diameters have also a structural function: just as the torso of Varāha is enclosed in the central narrow triangle, the extension of his arms together with the Devī is enclosed within the wider triangle F′-O-D formed by these two diameters.

INTEGRATION

The main form-elements being in the vertical and the whole composition being symmetrically balanced, the mood expressed in it is one of quiet solemnity rather than of forceful activity. Or, one might perhaps say more accurately, it represents an activity not directed outwards, but collected and held within itself. In the middle of the panel stands Varāha. His figure rises in one straight line from his left foot on the ground to his head. From the ankle it broadens upwards into the hip and the chest and leads directly into the core of the silent drama that is taking place. This firm, but easy upward soaring of one uninterrupted movement across the whole height of the panel, culminating in the crown of Varāha and spreading out branches on either side resembles the natural, effortless growth of a mighty tree. Two branches of this tree are constituted by Varāha's right leg and arms supporting the Devī on one side, and the arch of his left arms on the other. These two branches are rounded upwards and turned back towards the central stem, the body of Varāha. Enclosed within their curve lies the emotional focus of the composition, the two central figures turned towards one another in rapt contemplation. All other figures, although inwardly participating in the event, fall slightly back on both sides. Brahmā leans away with the upper part of his body, as if he wanted to give room, the Nāga submissively dips under the foot of Varāha, the two Yogins incline their heads, the Yoginī bends her knees and the line going upwards through her arm and head to the head of the Yogin is slanting away like the outline of Brahmā on the other side. The spaces that set apart the outer figures are marked by deep shadows, which bring the central group into stronger prominence. In spite of these gaps the composition does not fall apart. It is held together by the double steady ascent of movements working across the panel from left to right, which has been described. There is a delicate rhythm in the ascending sequence of these figures which, in their different size, shape and position, are like the notes and beats of a musical phrase. The flow of these ascending rhythms follows step by step the great action by which Varāha lifts Bhūdevī from the depth of the abyss to the regions of Sun and Moon. All figures help to fulfil this action by participating in its rhythm, each in its own way. The Nāga at the bottom of the panel is placed exactly below the point where the ascent reaches its culmination in the figure of the Devī, and by his squat and heavy mass underlines the upward aspiration of all others. Although the Nāga does not form a coil as in other sculptures, the cluster of lotus-leaves and the hoods with their wavy lines express, just as does a coil, the absense of direction and of delineation in the chaotic lower world. And in the economy of form it provides the necessary foil to the flowing, smooth, elongated simplicity of all other form-elements.

The show of physical exertion and the triumph of victory displayed in the other compositions of Varāha is here turned into a quiet state of inner concentration and contemplation. The birth of a new world does not produce any upheavel, but unfolds smoothly, without effort or stress. The interaction between all figures is psychological rather than dramatic, and takes place in the subtle sphere of inner participation.

All figures are modelled with the utmost economy, their aspects and attitudes being condensed into very few essential form-elements. Details like eyes, noses, mouths or ornaments are indicated only in their general shape and position, in their plastic values, without internal design. Each figure is inscribed in a simplified outline that obeys neat and well defined directions and angles. In the straight and sober contours, bathed in light and soft shadows, life and spirit are communicated by inner vibrations. A net of live currents spreads across the whole panel and fills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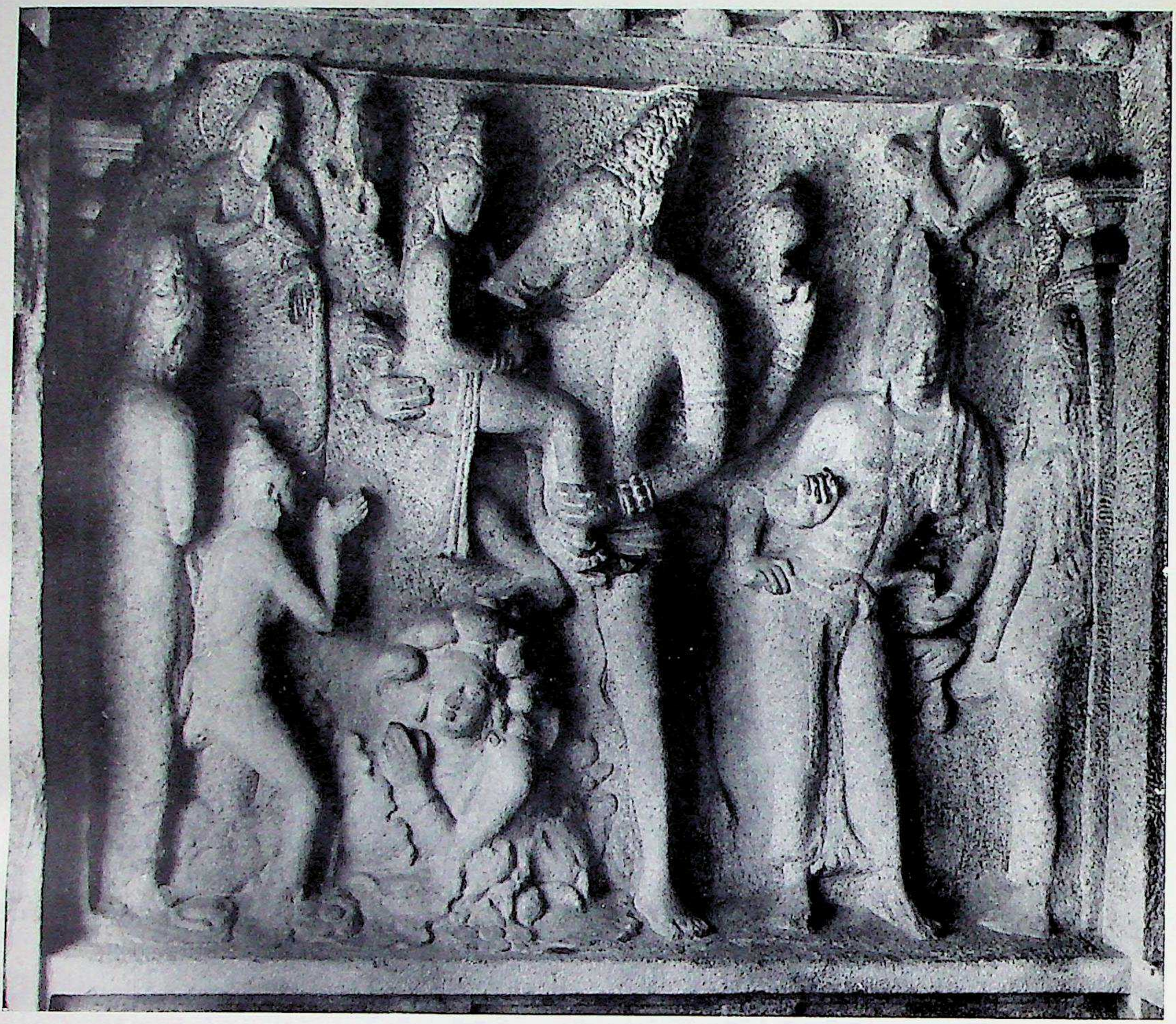
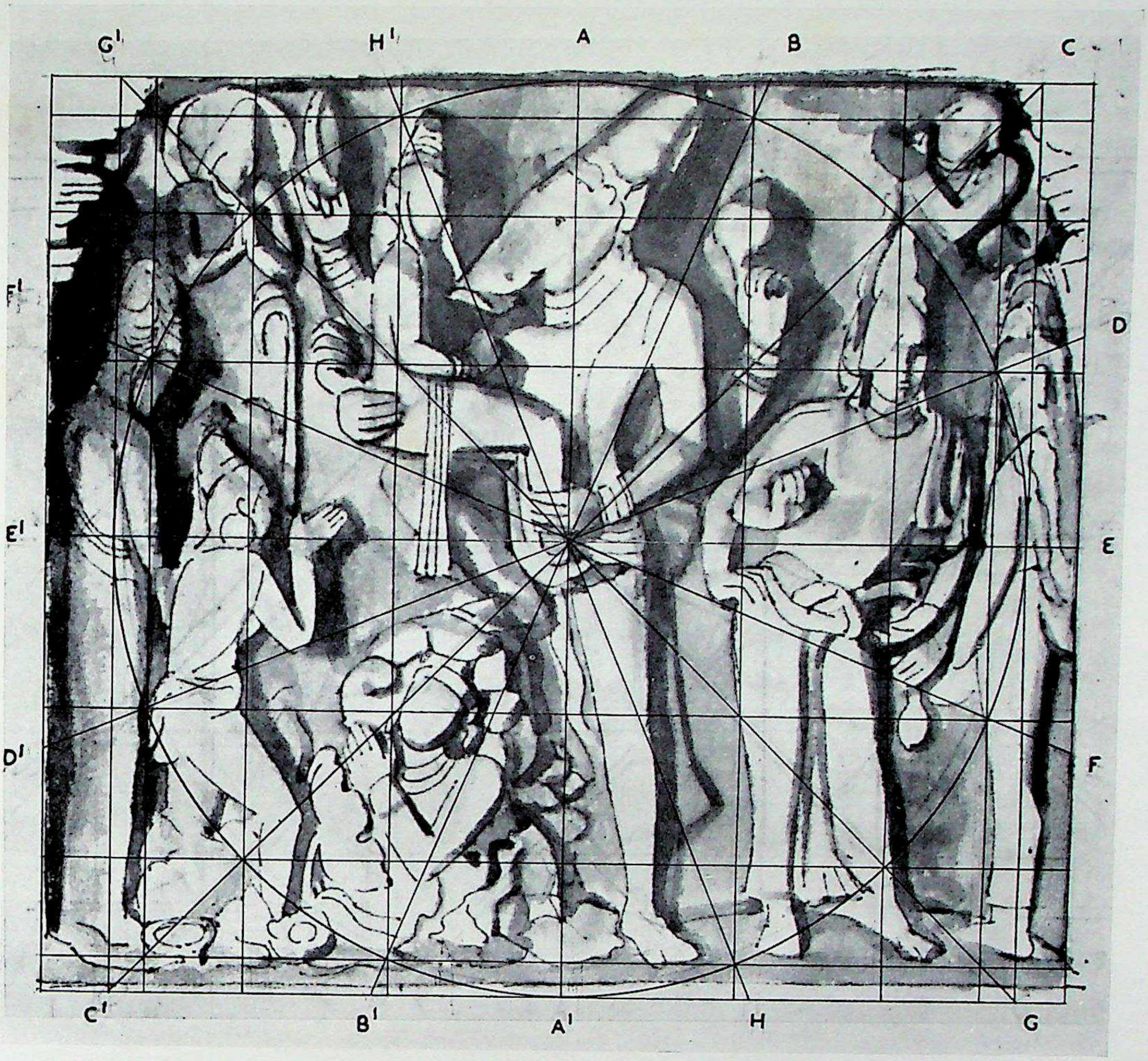
b. TIME DIVISION



VARĀHA AVATĀRA, MAHĀBALIPURAM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a. SPACE DIVISION

it with an atmosphere of intense rapture. This synthetic and sensitive modelling, which is a characteristic of all Pallava sculpture, is the crowning feature of a composition entirely devoid of violent contrasts, where action is sublimated into delicate cross-currents of pure rhythms. On this complex, but lucid and transparent texture, the subtle modulation, the gentle play with light and shade and the accent set on inner, psychological relations blossoms forth as the necessary, supreme fulfilment.

The symbolism of levels rising one above the other, which is a characteristic of other Varāha images, is here expressed in a different manner. It is incorporated in the double steady ascent from left to right, first from the Yogin on the left side up to Varāha, Bhūdevī and Sūrya, and then, parallel to it from the Nāga up to the Yoginī and Yogin on the right. It may also be implied in the attitude and position of the Devī, whose body, broken in two horizontals and two verticals, forms a kind of stairway reaching from the very centre of the composition, where her feet are resting, by the bend of her limbs up to the top. She would in this way incorporate the Ātman in its eternal aspiration towards the Light, in the embrace of the Divine Essence. It is not impossible that the female figure turned with joined hands towards Varāha, she, whose feet are entangled in water-plants and who in these pages has been called Yoginī, is in reality Bhūdevī herself, imploring Varāha to rescue her at the moment when he plunges into the depths. She would then be represented twice, before and after her liberation, which was not an uncommon practice in plastic and pictorial representations of early times. As a matter of fact this interpretation would complete and stress the conception of the Devī as the Ātmān, who, entangled in the Māyā of worldly existence, is imploring the help of the Divine One to achieve final emancipation.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

VIṢṆU ON ĀDIŚEṢA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XVII

Between one cycle of manifestation and another, Viṣṇu, having withdrawn into himself all Creation and Existence, is immersed in Yoga-nidrā, reclining on the coils of the Serpent Ādiśeṣa (the Rest) or Ananta (the Endless), who is but another form of himself. Ādiśeṣa is bending over Viṣṇu's head, protecting him with his hoods. On the opposite side Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu's spouse, is pressing his feet that lie on her lap. From Viṣṇu's navel a lotus is emerging on a long stalk, carrying Brahmā, the Creator of a future, new world. Viṣṇu's four hands are empty, because he is at rest, and the attributes he usually holds are personified by the Gaṇas, quietly seated at his feet, with two guardians at either end.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XVIIa

The panel is an almost regular square. The directing circle is coextensive with the panel and is divided by eight diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = descends from the right side of Brahmā, passes along the lines of Viṣṇu's belts, and between the second and third Gaṇa. It divides Viṣṇu's body in two equal halves.

H′-B′ = down through Viṣṇu's left shoulder and through the first Gaṇa.

B-H = down through the raised knee of Viṣṇu and through the fourth Gaṇa. Between these two lines, enclosing the central space, is Viṣṇu's body from his left shoulder to his raised knee, Brahmā above and two Gaṇas below.

G′-C′ = from the top of Viṣṇu's mukuṭa down along his lower right arm and the first coil. This interspace encloses Viṣṇu's head and right lower arm. The last interspace holds the big coil, Viṣṇu's upper right arm and the hoods and body of Ādiśeṣa, which are emerging from the side-wall.

C-G = on the left side, falls from the end of the bracket through Viṣṇu's shanks and the middle of the fifth Gaṇa. The outermost division holds

Viṣṇu's feet and Lakṣmī, as also the foremost Gaṇa facing the panel. Lakṣmī as well as Śeṣanāga's head and hoods are bending into the directing circle from either side.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = through the whole length of Viṣṇu's body, from his right elbow on the coil through his trunk and between his legs to his feet.

Madhya-bindu = between the hip-belts of Viṣṇu, below his navel.

F′-D = from Viṣṇu's eyes and left shoulder along his arm to the head of Lakṣmī.

D′-F = passes from Viṣṇu's right lower elbow along the line of the upper coils of the couch, cutting through the top of all the Gaṇas' mukuṭas. The interspaces between these last two lines contain and enclose the whole of Viṣṇu's body with the upper coils of the couch, except the mukuṭa and the hand raised towards the lotus.

G′-C = marks the top of Viṣṇu's mukuṭa and raised hand. Brahmā reaches up to the top of the panel, between the two brackets.

C′-G = passes through the seats of all the Gaṇas. The interspace holds all the Gaṇas lined up horizontally, only their feet and seats are below the line.

The horizontal divisions are the determining factor in this composition, while the verticals have only the function of articulating the horizontal extension in rhythmic intervals. The whole composition is governed by certain symmetries that are not immediately apparent. For instance, the central square around the madhya-bindu encloses the centre of Viṣṇu's body from left shoulder to knee and two of the coils, and a bigger square drawn around this from the points of intersection of the diagonals with the circle encloses Viṣṇu's body from his right shoulder to his ankles, and from the point of his mukuṭa and his raised hand to the Gaṇas below his couch.

Turning this same square by 45 degrees, so that its angles come to stand at the ends of the madhya sūtra and the madhya prastha respectively, it encloses Viṣṇu's figure in its extreme extensions. Viṣṇu's upper right elbow fills the right angle, while the side of the square runs along his forearm up to Brahmā who, although not quite symmetrically, fills the upper angle. The left angle is filled by Viṣṇu's feet, and in the lowest angle are two of the Gaṇas. Both Viṣṇu's right elbows lie on the line E′-A′. By means of this square standing on its point the figure of Brahmā lying apparently outside the context of the composition, is organically connected with the rest.

TIME-DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XVIIb

Essential diameters: F′-F and D′-D.

The horizontal dominating this composition is broken into an undulating movement alternating between the diameters F-F′ and D′-D and their parallels.

F-F′ = marks an overall upward slant of Viṣṇu's body from his right knee to the root of his neck.
E-G′ = marks the slant of his left shank and touches the top of his mukuṭa, thus connecting both ends of the figure.
D-H′ = from Lakṣmī's head to the tip of Viṣṇu's raised hand and the edge of Brahmā's lotus-seat.
G-E′ = from the feet of the foremost Gaṇa to Viṣṇu's upper right elbow along the slant of his right flank.
D′-D = the complementary diameter runs along Viṣṇu's right lower forearm and as axis through his left thigh.
E′-C = shows the rising line from his right elbow to his right shoulder up to the raised left hand.
F′-B = from the head of the Nāga through Viṣṇu's mukuṭa on the level of his finger-tips up to the seat of Brahmā.
G′-A = from the top of Viṣṇu's mukuṭa to the top of Brahmā's head. Viṣṇu's head and mukuṭa and Brahmā on his lotus-seat are on the same oblique plane.
C′-E = marks the upward slant of Viṣṇu's right shank, which converges on the madhya-prastha with the downward slant of the left shank. Together they form an angle corresponding to the angle of the elbow on the other side.

Viṣṇu's left arm lying on the thigh has a slant that is not in accordance with any diameter, but is determined by the line E′-D, which holds the middle between the horizontal and the diameter just described.

The two complementary diameters F′-F and D′-D are almost equivalent in strength. They are closely related to the horizontal, they can in this case be considered as mere modifications of the horizontal, creating throughout its expanse an alternation of heaving and sinking movements, resembling those of large waves.

A quite different function devolves on the diameters B′-B and H-H′, which run at right angles across the main oblique trends of Viṣṇu's body and articulate its undulating movement into different sections.

B′-B = up along the side of the second Gaṇa and along Viṣṇu's forearm raised towards Brahmā.
C′-A = cuts through Viṣṇu's lower elbow and runs through the breadth of his chest up to the right side of Brahmā.

Between these two lines lies a sequence of forms, which is the strongest break in the horizontal expanse of Viṣṇu's body and virtually cuts the panel into a right and a left half. This sequence starts from the first right Gaṇa, then continues in Viṣṇu's right forearm, in the lotus stalk and the raised left forearm and culminates in the lotus with Brahmā.

D′-H′ = from the big coil along Viṣṇu's right upper forearm and through the base of his mukuṭa.
E′-G′ = along the Nāga to the top of the mukuṭa. Three of Viṣṇu's forearms lie in this direction and thus give it a fairly strong accentuation.
A′-C = runs up between two coils of the Nāga and across Viṣṇu's knee to the point of his outstretched hand.
H-D = coming up from the fourth Gaṇa marks the slant from Viṣṇu's feet along Lakṣmī's arms to her head.
G-E = shows the slant of the foremost Gaṇa's front.

The complementary diameter H-H′, although less striking, is not unimportant either, especially in the slants of its parallels, in the upper part of Viṣṇu's body.

H-H′ = runs up along the outline of the third Gaṇa and then across Viṣṇu's body.
A′-G′ = crosses Viṣṇu's lowest arm on the line of the bracelet and runs as axis through the upward slant of his chest, neck and head up to the top of the mukuṭa.
B′-F′ = coming up from the outer limit of the first Gaṇa marks the slant of Viṣṇu's lowest right arm and divides it from the big coil.
G-A = rises from the lap of the fifth Gaṇa, runs through Viṣṇu's right knee and both his left hands and ends in Brahmā's raised right hand.
F-B = from the head of the foremost Gaṇa through Viṣṇu's ankles.
E-C = along Lakṣmī's forward bent body and face.

The two second parallels of these two complementary diameters B′-F′ and H-D form together a trapezium opening upwards from the base of the panel and enclosing the entire figure of Viṣṇu with four of the coils on which he is lying and four of the Gaṇas. Inside the trapezium there is also an inverted triangle with apex at A′, having its sides directed into the most projecting points of Viṣṇu's upper outline, his knees and his mukuṭa. The coils below him are set in symmetrical order, not along the verticals, but along these oblique divisions.

Also the diagonal diameters come into play in this composition. On the right side the two diagonal radii running up along Viṣṇu's mukuṭa and down along his lowest arm embrace his entire upper body. At the bottom of the panel the diagonals enclose the group of the four Gaṇas, each one being set in one of the radial divisions issuing from the madhya-bindu. Their ends touch the feet of the two guardian Gaṇas on either side and assign them their places symmetrically opposite one another (Plate XVIIa).

INTEGRATION

The simplicity in the outlay of this composition gives a feeling of repose and peace. The dominating horizontal is the expression of perfect quiescence. There is no friction, stress or tension anywhere. The ascending and descending forms flow into one another with harmonious ease, undisturbed by any contending or antagonistic forces.

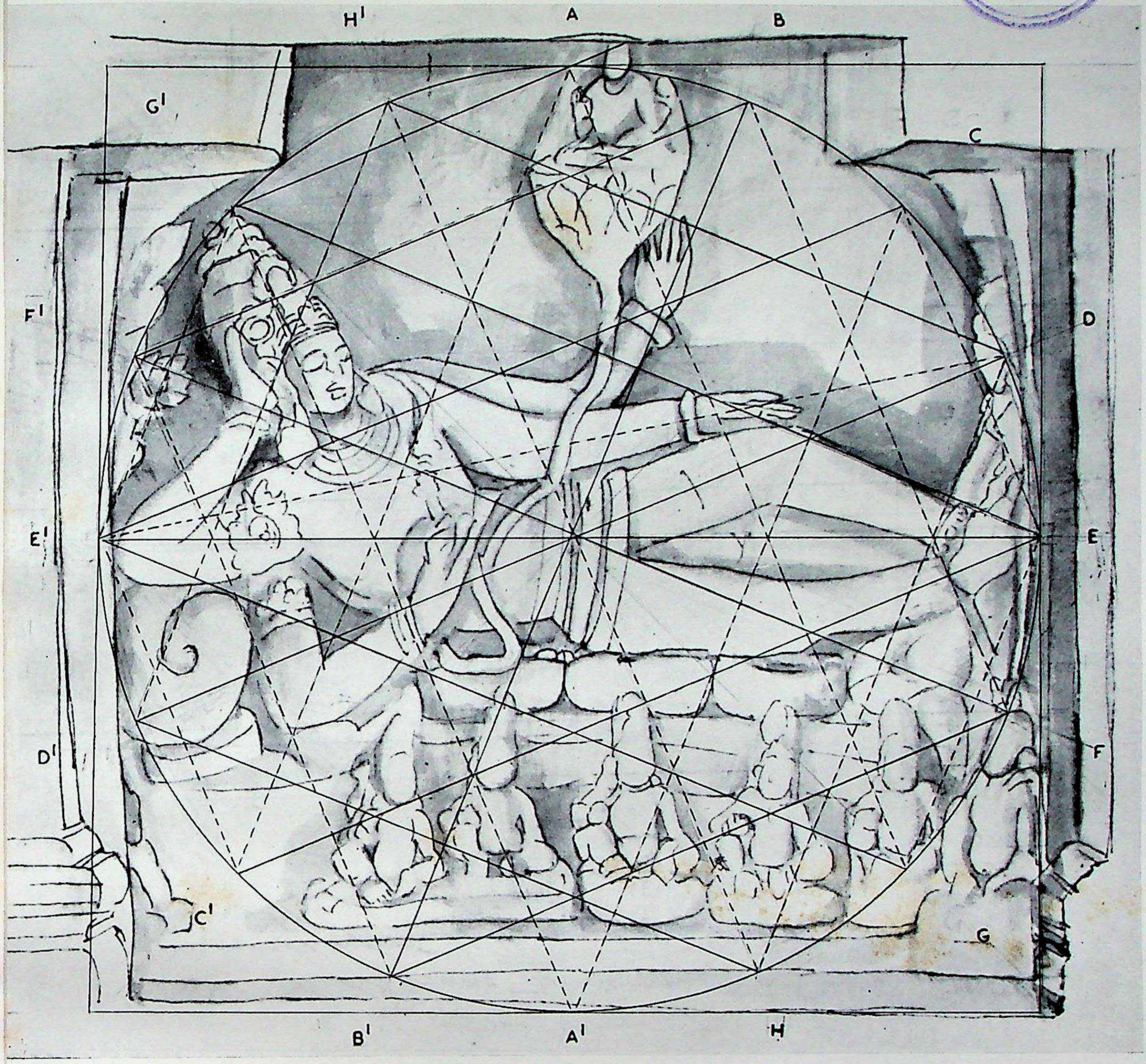
All figures around Viṣṇu are there to protect and guard his Great Sleep. They surround his body on all sides, from right and left, from above and below, in order to create a middle space of profound timeless peace. Lakṣmī and Adiśeṣa are protectively bent over Viṣṇu at either end, and the Gaṇas are as silent sentinels below his couch. Meanwhile a new world in the form of a lotus is emerging from his navel, swaying to and fro in the dumb, painless growth of a plant.

Viṣṇu's body covers the entire Universe in an attitude of complete relaxation, and in the broad undulating outlines of his limbs suggests the slow heaving and falling of deep waters. Viṣṇu and the endless Ocean are one, the Sea of all possibilities, the Source of all Life. The movement of the Waters is Viṣṇu's breath. Profoundly immersed in his cosmic Sleep, he appears unaware of the beginning of a new creation. Only one hand is raised, as in a dream, to acknowledge the stir of life issuing from his body. A deep silent breathing pervades everything and an expectation of things to come. The Gaṇas, in their regular array seem to be measuring the length of Viṣṇu's body, and in their silent expectation the duration of his sleep.

> "When the three worlds are but one mighty ocean, Brahmā, who is one with Nārāyaṇa, satiate with the demolition of the universe, sleeps upon his serpent-bed—contemplated, the lotus-born, by the ascetic inhabitants of the Janaloka—for a night of equal duration with his day, at the close of which he creates anew".
>
> (Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Book I, Chapter III, transl. by H H. Wilson).

State Museum Library Lucknow

PLATE XVII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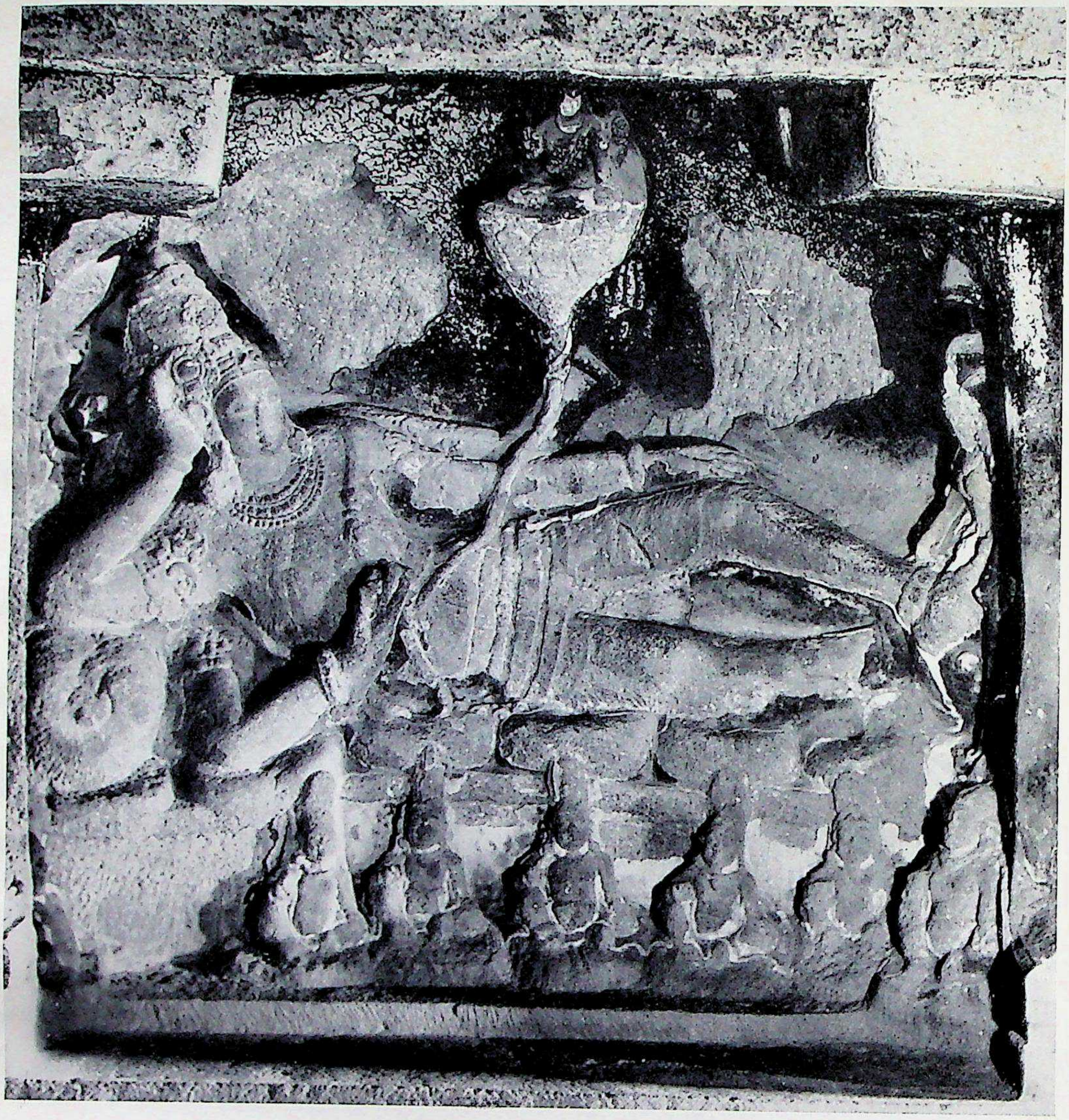
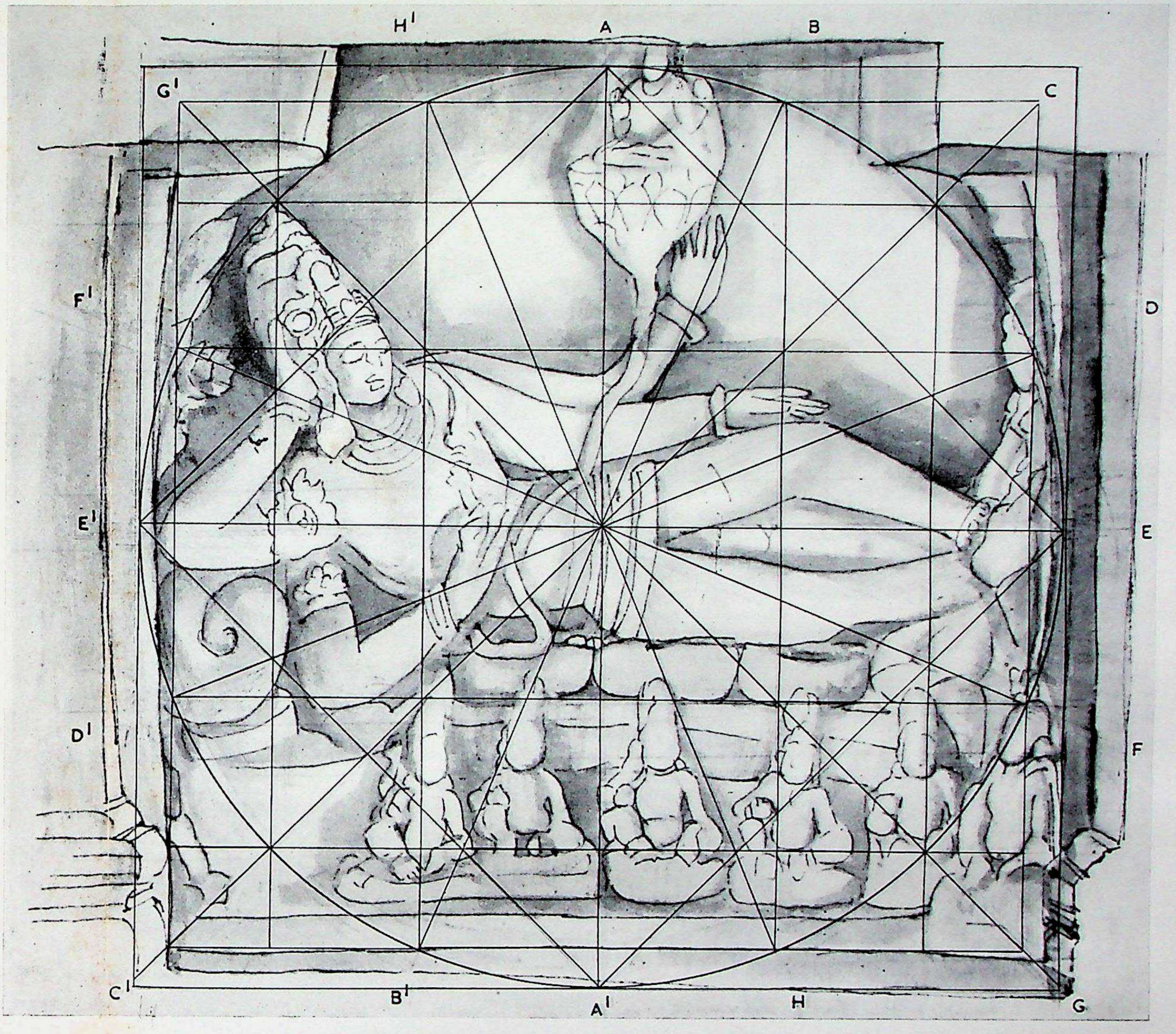
b. TIME DIVISION



VIṢṆU ON ĀDIŚEṢA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VIṢṆU ON ĀDIŚEṢA

MAHĀBALIPURAM, 7TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XVIII

A different version of the same subject as that on the previous panel is here represented. Brahmā on the lotus is absent. But the two Dānavas, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who slipped out of Viṣṇu's ears at the time of Creation, stand at his feet, armed with clubs and ready to destroy the new world that is to be born from Viṣṇu's navel. Viṣṇu has only two arms and holds no attributes. Below the couch formed by the coils of Ādiśeṣa are two attendants, one kneeling and the other as if standing in water. Both seem to be engaged in conversation. Perhaps they are personifications of two of Viṣṇu's attributes, the Sudarśana Cakra and the Padma (lotus standing in water). At his feet is Lakṣmī in devotional genuflexion. Above the sleeping Viṣṇu, on a background indicating clouds, a fat Gaṇa and an Apsaras are joyfully sailing through the air. These may also be personifications of Visnu's other attributes, the Śaṅkha Pāñcajanya and the Gada Kaumodakī, the latter being always represented by a female figure, when in anthropomorphic garb.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XVIIIa

The panel is an elongated horizontal rectangle. The madhya-sūtra descends between the two flying figures, through Viṣṇu's groin to the back of the kneeling attendant, through his arm and his foot. The madhya-prastha runs from below the hoods of the Nāga, across Viṣṇu's shoulder through the whole length of his body, between his two legs and across the hips of the Dānavas. This line is the backbone of the composition.

The madhya-bindu lies in Viṣṇu's groin, at the mūlādhāra, or, perhaps at the svādhiṣṭhāna cakra, which is the centre of the element water.

From the madhya-bindu the directing circle is drawn to the height of the panel. It is divided by four diameters and completed with vertical and horizontal chords, which latter are extended to both ends of the panel. Two vertical tangents on the sides of the circle divide the panel into a central square in which horizontal forms predominate and two lateral upright rectangles, in which the aggregate forms are bundled into vertical blocs. The central field holds the figure of Viṣṇu, the central coils of Ādiśeṣa forming the couch and the five small figures, the right rectangle holds the outermost coils and the hoods of Ādiśeṣa, while the left rectangle holds the two Dānavas.

To facilitate further operations and to find the parallels across the entire panel, two more circles of equal diameter are added with centres at the points of intersection of the vertical chords of the central circle with the madhya-prastha. These outer circles, which reach slightly beyond the side-walls of the panel, are again divided by four diameters. The diagonals of all three circles produce a network of squares and rectangles standing on their points, and mark the limits of the most important compositional form-complexes. They also allow us to draw a few more vertical and horizontal chords through their points of crossing, which mark important divisions.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = already described

B-H = along the front of the flying Apsaras, across Viṣṇu's knees and along the head and hand of Lakṣmī.

H′-B′ = along the back of the flying Gaṇa, the vertically raised arm of Viṣṇu, the loop of his yajñopavīta and the front of the kneeling attendant.

These two vertical interspaces right and left of the madhya-sūtra hold the two flying figures and Viṣṇu's body from his yajñopavīta to his knees. The kneeling attendant below Viṣṇu is in line with the flying Gaṇa above, while the space below the Apsaras remains empty. Each of these three small figures is delimited within one space-division.

g′-b′ = runs through the lowest hood above Viṣṇu's face, across Viṣṇu's neck and armpit, and as axis through the body of the small attendant below him.

G′-C′ = through the second hood above Viṣṇu, through Viṣṇu's headdress and along the line of the coil and the forearm of the attendant.

These last two interspaces hold Viṣṇu's chest and face and the figure of the first attendant.

f′-c′ = is the axis through the three hoods standing along the outer wall, through the three uppermost coils, in whose middle lies Viṣṇu's outstretched hand.

b-g = on the left side, through Viṣṇu's ankles along the hem of his garment and across the middle of Lakṣmī's figure.
C-G = along the limit of the Dānava group, dividing them from Viṣṇu and Ādiśeṣa.
These two interspaces hold Viṣṇu's legs from his knees downwards and the entire figure of Lakṣmī.
c-f = forms the plumb-line through the figure of the first Dānava.

All the vertical divisions show symmetrical correspondences. As the group of Dānavas is balanced by the vertical array of coils and hoods on the other side, so the figure of Lakṣmī occupies the position corresponding to that of the first attendant on the other side. Viṣṇu's face on the right side holds the position corresponding to that of his feet on the left side, his chest corresponds with his shins, his belly with his thighs. The two flying figures hold the exact middle, each one in a separate division. With respect to them the two attendants below the couch are displaced by one space-division towards the right, which is just enough to break an eventual monotony and bring a certain flux into the composition. There is also a changing rhythm in the sequence of the vertical space-divisions. They are diminishing in width from the centre towards the circumference of the central circle, and are flanked on both sides by one wider division followed by one equal to the smallest. These together form solid buttresses on both sides of the central square, encompassing the horizontal extension of Viṣṇu's body.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = already described.

e′-d = through Viṣṇu's mukuṭa and hand, along the lower limit of the flying figures and across the Dānavas below their shoulders.
d′-e = runs across the wrist of Viṣṇu's extended hand and along the outer edge of the couch. It crosses the headdresses of the three small figures and the thighs of the Dānavas.

These two central space-divisions above and below the madhya-prastha enclose Viṣṇu's body with his raised and his outstretched arm, and the outermost hood between arm and head. They hold the middle part of the Dānavas with their arms and maces.

F′-D = runs through the two highest hoods of Ādiśeṣa, along the armline of the two flying figures to the heads of the Dānavas.

This space-division together with the next, reaching to the upper limit of the panel, enclose the four uppermost hoods of Ādiśeṣa, both flying figures and the shoulders and heads of the Dānavas. A subdivision along the dotted line between F′-D and e′-d marks the height of the second front-hood, Viṣṇu's mukuṭa, the groins of the flying figures and the shoulders of the Dānavas.

D′-F = below the centre, runs along the line of demarcation between the upper and the lower coils, and through the waists and elbows of the three small figures below the couch.

This and the next space-division below hold the couch, the three attendants and the legs of the Dānavas. A subdivision along the dotted line between d'-e and D′-F marks the shoulder-line of the three small figures and the knees of the first Dānava.

In the space-organisation of this panel not only the verticals and horizontals have to be taken into account, but also the diagonals through all three circles and some of their outer parallels.

G-G′ = the diagonal of the middle circle, runs from the foot of the Dānava up along the inclination of Lakṣmī's body, and through Viṣṇu's raised hand further up along the outline of the hoods.

C′-C = the other diagonal, runs along the right thigh and the yajñopavīta of the first attendant to the mukuṭa of the second attendant, across Viṣṇu's lap to the knee of the Apsaras and to the top of the second Dānava's mukuṭa.

These two diagonals cut out four triangles: the upper one encompasses the two flying figures within a clear space, the lower one, framed in between Lakṣmī and the first attendant, holds the kneeling attendant on the right side of the madhya-sūtra. The triangle on the right side joined to the outer rectangle holds the upper part of Viṣṇu's body and the hoods of the Nāga, the triangle on the left side joined to the outer rectangle holds Viṣṇu's legs, the torso and head of Lakṣmī and the figures of the Dānavas.

B′-cc = the diagonal of the left circle, runs up along thigh and arm of the second attendant, across the top of Lakṣmī's mukuṭa, along Viṣṇu's upper foot to the shoulder and head of the first Dānava.

ff-H′ = the other diagonal, runs along the Dānava's outer foot to Viṣṇu's left ankle and through the groin of the Apsaras to the head of the Gaṇa.

These diagonals of the outer circles connect the forms in the outer rectangles with the centre of the panel. Equally important are their outer parallels:

g-E = from Lakṣmī's buttocks to the lower end of the Dānava's club.

E-b = along chest and shoulder of the first Dānava and the cheek of the second Dānava.

These two lines, converging at right angles at the outer end of the madhya-prastha give inner demarcations in the bodies of the Dānavas and follow the contradictory tendencies and directions of their movements.

H-ff′ = the diagonal of the right circle, runs as axis through Viṣṇu's head and through the middle of the hoods.

E′-b′ = its lower parallel, runs across the wrist of Viṣṇu's extended hand to the groin of the first attendant.

cc′-B = the other diagonal, runs transversally across Viṣṇu's chest and his upper hand, and then through the body of the flying Gaṇa to the head of the Apsaras.

E′-g′ = its upper parallel, runs transversally across the hoods, from the first to the fourth, dividing them from the second and the third hood.

These diagonals are all very essential for the disposition in space of the various large form-aggregates. Not only do they hold form-masses apart in distinct and separate areas of the panel, but they also determine axes and outlines of relevant parts in the outlying portions of the panel. And above all, they connect the peripheral masses, as though by a net of nerve-lines, with the centre of the composition. They hold distant and heterogeneous elements together and thus create that vital inner cohesion, which a simple vertical-horizontal juxtaposition of big masses in such an extended composition could hardly hope to achieve.

TIME-DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XVIIIb

In this composition the time-division can be done in different ways, with or without the lateral circles. We have omitted the lateral circles in order to simplify the scheme. However it may be done, the space-directions determining the movements remain the same, only their positions may be slightly shifted to one side or the other.

The movements are directed by the intermediate diameters, which are absent in the space-division. Therefore the central circle has to be divided by eight diameters instead of four, as was done in the space-division. The essential diameters are F′F′, D′-D, and B′-B, H-H′.

F-F′ = is important only in its upper half. It gives the slant of Viṣṇu's body from the groin up to the mukuṭa and divides the three hoods aligned behind Viṣṇu's head from the two standing in front one above the other.

e-f′ = its upper parallel runs through the lower end of the Dānava's mace, along the line of his waist-band, then from Viṣṇu's foot to the topmost hood of the Nāga, spanning the entire ascent of Viṣṇu's upper outline together with that of the Nāgahoods. It also passes from knee and foot of the Apsaras across the groin of the Gaṇa.

E-H′ = across the Dānava's mace and chest, along the left leg and right arm of the Apsaras to the left arm and head of the Gaṇa.

d-A = from the root of the necks of both the Dānavas to the hand and head of the Apsaras.

The flight of the Apsaras and the Gaṇa is channelled between these last three lines, which indicate the direction of their movement, and so are the torsos of the Dānavas.

D′-D = the complementary diameter, runs from the right hand of Viṣṇu to the first attendant's mukuṭa and to the shoulder-line of the first Dānava.
d′-cc = the next parallel is more important, as it marks the line of Viṣṇu's outstretched arm, his shoulder- and neckline, projected upwards through the legs of the Apsaras and across the mukuṭa of the second Dānava.
E′-B = runs transversally across the two lowest hoods on either side of Viṣṇu's head and across the shoulders of the Gaṇa to the head of the Apsaras.
e′-A = across the second hoods on either side of Viṣṇu's head and along the top of his mukuṭa to the head of the Gaṇa.

These lines running transversally across the hoods and the head of Viṣṇu mark the position of these forms in a perspective directed from the surface level of the panel towards its central depth. On the other side the position of the two Dānavas, placed one behind the other, shows a similar recession in depth in opposite direction. The point of convergence of these two groups of forms lies at the centre, in the depth of the panel. This is another feature which links both ends together and creates an inner cohesion between them.

A different function devolves on the diameters H′-H and B′-B, which connect forms across the height of the panel.

B′-B = connects the kneeling attendant with the Apsaras. It runs as axis through her entire body, from her right knee to her left shoulder.
b′-A = runs through the slant of the first attendant's body along his yajñopavīta, then along the coil behind his back, across Viṣṇu's chest and through the slant of the Gaṇa's body, which thus lies in the prolongation of the slant of the first attendant's body. All the upper coils of the Nāga and Viṣṇu's belt lie equally along this direction.
C′-H′ = between Viṣṇu's chin and neck up to the hand of the Gaṇa. Parallel tangent on the circle = marks the front of the second upper hood.
D′-G′ = separates the three hoods in front from the two behind Viṣṇu's head.

On the left side are relevant only:

H-c = through the incisions of Lakṣmī's neck and Viṣṇu's ankles to the forehead of the second Dānava.
Parallel tangent on the circle = axis of the first Dānava's head.
G-D = from the Dānava's foot along his thigh, his chest and his club it marks the essential slant of his powerful figure, which is enclosed between this and the previous line. It is doubled by two further parallels, one along his club and the other through his left shank.

All lines along this diameter provide a consequent inner articulation in the long horizontal expanse of Viṣṇu's body, and also in the vertical form-complexes on both sides of the panel. The coils of the Śeṣanāga turned upwards fall into line with the belt of Viṣṇu, with the flying figures and with the slant of the first Dānava, and are directed towards the depth of the panel. The Śeṣanāga's hoods, since they are rounded, are determined by different space-directions, but their forward bend is in its totality also directed by the diameter B′-B. The complementary H-H′ has a similar function, but is less marked.

H-H′ = shows the backward pull of the flying Gaṇa's upper body.
A′-g′ = shows the forward inclination of the second attendant's body, from his left foot to his head, as well as the outline of the last hood. The attendant's left arm and Viṣṇu's raised forearm follow this direction.
B′-ff′ = runs along the kneeling attendant's shin and the first attendant's upper arm up to the front of Śeṣanāga's central hood.
Parallel tangent on the circle = from the groin of the first attendant to Viṣṇu's mukuṭa and to Śeṣanāga's second front-hood.
g-A = on the left side of the panel, shows the forward slant ofLakṣmī's body, the backward pull of the Apsarās' flank and forearm.
ff-B = the Apsarās' forearm and limit of her figure.
Parallel tangent on the circle = from the left foot of the first Dānava to the elbow of the second Dānava.
F-C = the most prominent in this set, gives the slant of the first Dānava's left thigh, of his right arm, and of the second Dānava's head. The next parallel shows the line of the second Dānava's club, which is complementary to the club of the first Dānava. Also the axes of their heads are complementary.

In the vertical mass of the two Dānavas there is not a single vertical form, except the outline of the whole group facing Viṣṇu. The whole group, although vertical in its totality, is entirely resolved into a play of complementary slants.

We have already hinted at the unusual feature that distinguishes this panel, of being carved on different surface-levels. Only the lower half and the two lateral rectangles are even with the surface of the wall. The figure of Viṣṇu is, in its whole length, carved into the depth of the wall, and by this the entire upper central field with the flying figures is removed to a deeper level. It is remarkable that, despite such a strong displacement of levels the lines of the composition do not suffer any break and are throughout effectively maintained. The backward sloping positions of the Nāgahoods and of the two Dānavas is on both sides mediating between the front-level and the depth of the panel.

INTEGRATION

Viṣṇu is not shown here in his traditional attitude of Nārāyaṇa-Śeṣaśāyin, slightly turned on one side, with one hand supporting his head and with one foot crossing the other, attitude in which the rigid horizontal is broken into a slowly undulating line that creates in the onlooker the feeling of a dreamlike state rather than of deep sleep.

Here he is lying flat on his back, in complete abandon, with his legs stretched and slightly parted, and with the right arm thrown back straight across the couch. Save for his head, which is slightly raised by the elevation of the hoods, the line of his body remains strictly horizontal, conveying the feeling of an almost death-like slumber. Having withdrawn the outside world into himself, Viṣṇu has passed beyond all states of waking or dreamlike consciousness. He is immersed in Yoga-nidrā and dwells in his supreme and purest state, the great Void.

"The Lord is Himself the great World-dreamer slumbering in causal sleep as Īśvara, dreaming as Hiraṇyagarbha the universe experienced by him as the Virāṭ or totality of all Jīvas, on waking." [1]

But quite unlike the Elūrā panel of the same subject, which breathes perfect harmony and peace, the present composition is filled with great inner tension, brought about by the sharp and abrupt juxtaposition of two antagonistic form-complexes: one is the long, unbroken horizontal extension of the Śeṣanāga's body with the recumbent figure of Viṣṇu, and the other the tense and compact vertical mass of the Dānavas. They stand divided as two separate entities, as two blocs incorporating contrasting and irreconcilable moods, between whom no relation or connection seems possible. And yet they belong together and constitute one integrated and indivisible whole. They embody the creative and destructive aspects of the world-process, which are indissolubly interwoven.

Viṣṇu, as the sattvic principle, is the eternal aspiration of the spirit towards new creation. The two Dānavas, as the rājasic and the tāmasic principles at the other end of the world-wheel, are ever obscuring and destroying the works and emanations of the spirit. But they are equally necessary: they destroy the old to make room for the new creation. Here these two antagonistic powers stand against each other at right angles, just as in the diagram of the guṇas described in the Introduction. Only their position is inverted: when Sattva is asleep, Rajo- and Tamoguna stand up. Sattvaguna not only occupies the middle, but is actually circumscribed by the central circle of the composition. The peaceful form of Viṣṇu and the gentle liveliness of the small Devatās surrounding him are all comprised within this circle. This part is bathed in the fullest light, and the

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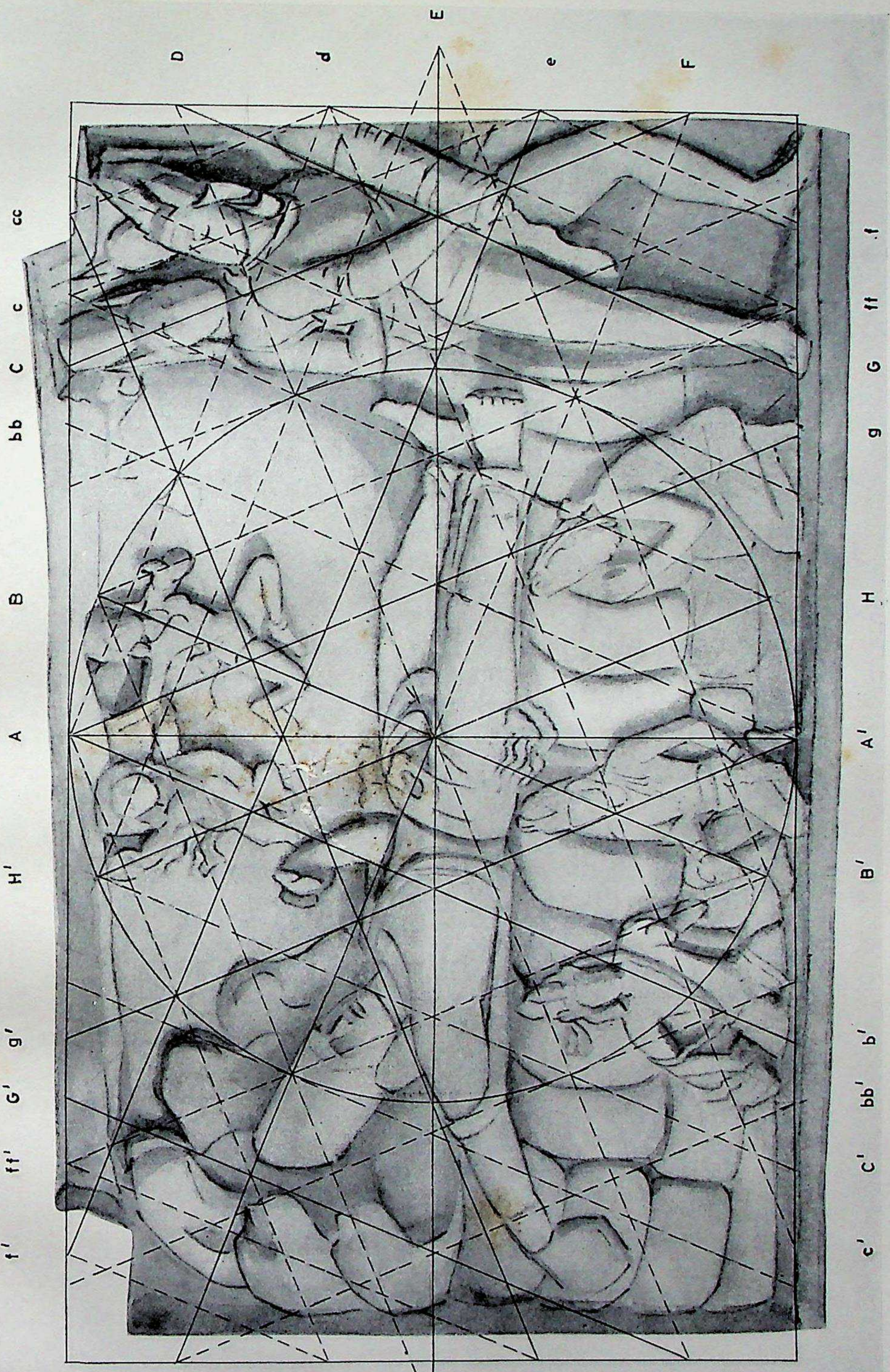
[1] Quoted by Sir John Woodroffe in Shakti and Shākta, p. 305.

PLATE XVIII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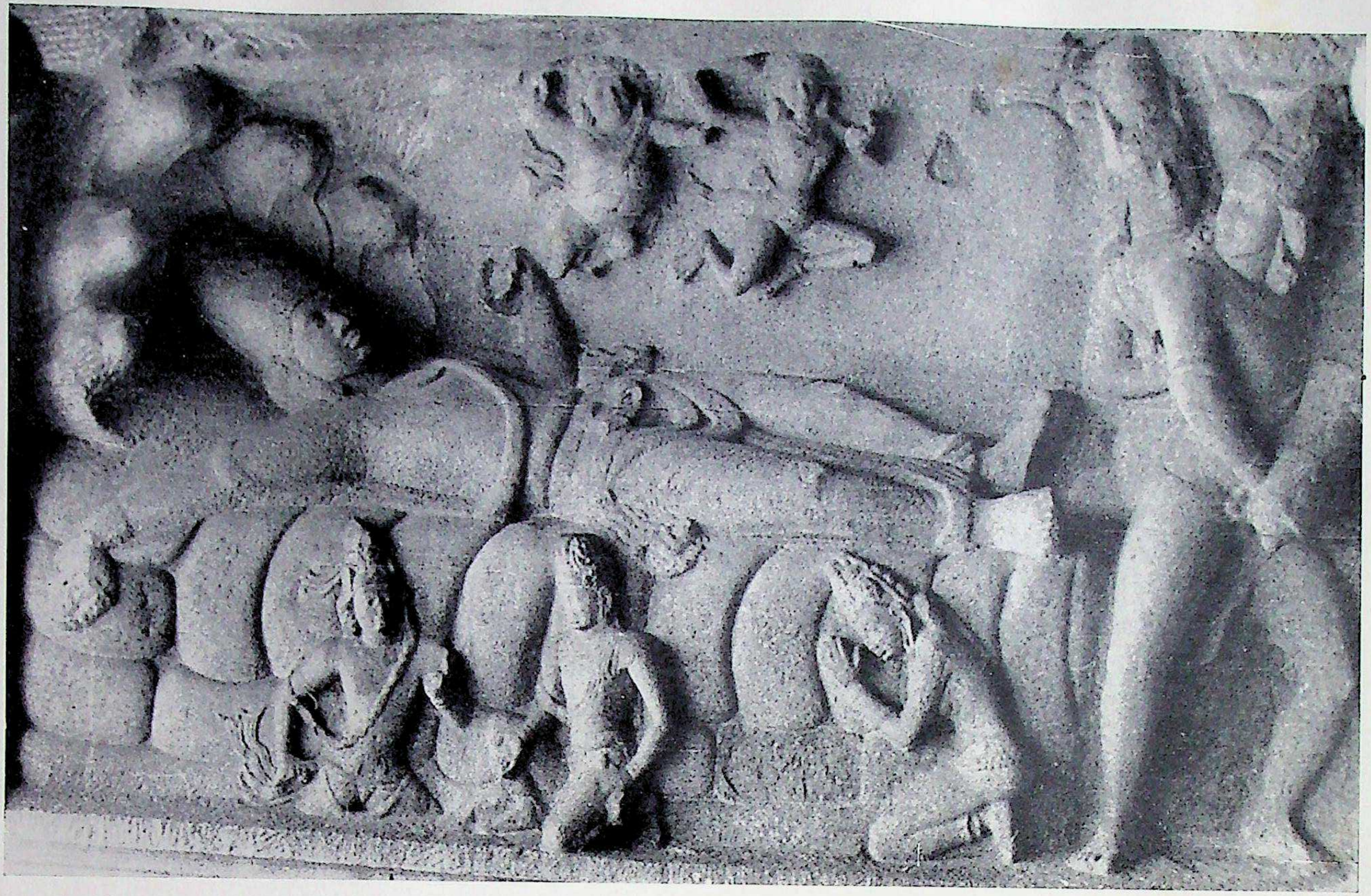
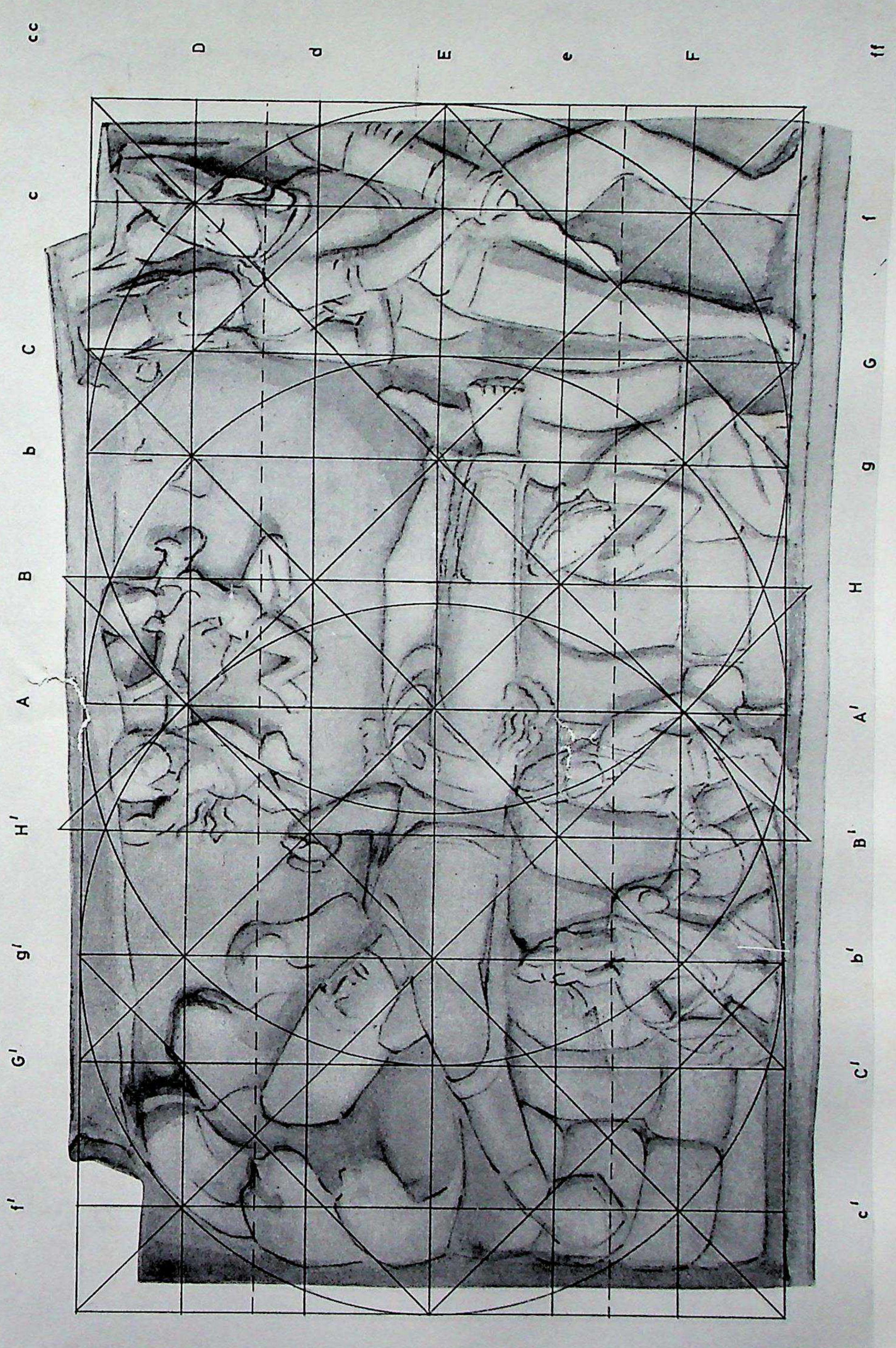
b. TIME DIVISION



VIṢṆU ON ĀDIŚESA, MAHĀBALIPURAM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a. SPACE DIVISION

forms are articulated by soft, slight shadows only. Tamoguṇa is represented on both sides outside the central circle, with forms marked by deep, heavy shadows. It is here of two kinds: on one side it is inert, incorporated in the chtonic forces of the Adiśeṣa, which are not inimical to the sattvic principle, but serve it as support for bringing forth manifestation. On the other side it is activated by Rajas, as represented by the Dānavas, and has become destructive. The Dānavas are threatening to break into the sacred precincts of the centre, and are ready to destroy the creation that is to emerge from the navel of Nārāyaṇa. But the hoods of Adiśeṣa are protectively spread over it, bent towards the magic circle that guards the birthplace of a new world from the attacks of the asuric forces. The whole essence of the drama is brought into a synthesis in the clash between these horizontal and vertical form-masses. The mythological story, thus presented in pure and concise form expressions, devoid of anecdotical elements, becomes a symbol of the eternal struggle between Light and Darkness, between the forces of Creation and Destruction, which, simultaneously and in alternation, work the everlasting transmutation of all Life.

PART TWO

ŚAIVA IMAGES

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ŚIVA NAṬARĀJA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XIX

Śiva is shown in his cosmic Dance of Creation and Dissolution. He is standing on a rectangular pedestal, which appears unfinished and might have been intended as a lotus-pedestal, similar to the one supporting the Naṭarāja figure outside the Bādāmī Cave Temple. Śiva has eight arms. In two right hands he holds ḍamaru and paraśu, the third hand (arm broken) rests on his thigh, while the fourth arm (broken) is flung across the chest in the pose called daṇḍa-hasta. The foremost left hand is a tripatāka, the constant correlate of the daṇḍa-hasta, which in the later bronze-images of Naṭarāja was transformed into abhaya-mudrā. The second left hand is a pravartita hasta in the attitude of upholding Heaven, the third is a patāka hasta and the fourth is stretched out holding a snake. Śiva stands on both his feet, but while resting his weight on the left foot he is raising the heel of the right foot to beat the rhythm (kuṭṭitam pose). Half hidden behind Śiva is Mahākāla (Great Time), with one foot raised on the pedestal. To his left is Pārvatī, holding the infant Skanda by the hand. She is accompanied by an imp-like Gaṇa and is resting her arm on the head of a female dwarf. To the right of Śiva three musicians are playing on different instruments, drum, flute and karatālas. On both sides of Śiva, in the upper corners of the panel, small figures of the Dikpālas, guardians of the eight quarters, are floating on clouds. Covering the pilaster brackets above them, other celestial beings are riding on Śārdūlas.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XIXa

The panel is an upright rectangle. The diameter of the directing circle corresponds to the height of the panel. This circle is basically sexpartite, but because of the richness and intricacy of the composition it had to be further subdivided and made dodecapartite. The intermediate diameters are not used in themselves. Only the points where they touch the circle are used to add subsidiary parallels to the basic diameters. To mark the distinction between basic and subsidiary divisions the first ones have been marked with capital letters, and the others with small letters. The basic divisions will always be taken first, and the subdivisions be put in after.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the middle of Śiva's head, along the yajñopavīta or garland falling on his chest, across his right thigh and along the vertical of Mahākāla's raised leg down to his heel and through the middle of the pedestal.

F′-B′ = descends from the front of the right bracket through Śiva's hand with the ḍamaru and forms the axis of the standing drum.

B-F = descends from the front of the left bracket along the vertical forearms of the pravartita and patāka hastas, through the raised hood of the snake-belt, Pārvatī's right hip and left foot.

These two lines divide the central field from the brackets, they encompass the entire figure of Śiva, less his outermost hands, and separate him from the lateral groups. They enclose also the figure of Mahākāla, the karatāla-player, the imp and the child Skanda. This middle-space is divided by two more verticals f′-a′ and a-f.

f′-a′ = marks the limit of Śiva's right shoulder and knee, and runs through Mahākāla's snake-garland and along the right side of the pedestal.

a-f = descends through the tripatāka hasta and forms the vertical axis of Śiva's left thigh and the left front-edge of the pedestal.

These two lines enclose the central and most essential parts of Śiva's body, from shoulder to shoulder, with the head holding a central axial position, both his legs and the pedestal.

The outer space-division between B-F and C-E holds the left bracket, the Dikpāla groups, Śiva's patāka hasta and hand with the snake, the figure of Pārvatī and the dwarf.

The space between F′-B′ and E′-C′ holds the right bracket, the Dikpālas, the shaft of the paraśu, the flute-player and the drummer.

The outer lines of these divisions mark the sides of the panel. They are subdivided by subsidiary vertical chords:

b-e = descends from the centre of the bracket and runs as axis through the figure of Nirṛti, across Śiva's wrist, along the inner line of Pārvatī's arm and the front of the dwarf.

e′-b′ = from the rider on the bracket through the heads of Indra's elephant and Agni's ram and along the front of the drummer's body, dividing him from the flute-player.

On the whole these two outermost space-divisions on either side show a remarkable degree of correspondence and symmetry. In both of them vertical forms are preponderant; they form a frame for the central field, where asymmetrical, excentric movements are displayed.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = from the base of the clouds on the right side, across Śiva's hand holding the paraśu and the head of Mahākāla, below the knot of the snakebelt on Śiva's left thigh to the head of Pārvatī.

E′-C = along the extension of Śiva's shoulders and left arms and his right hand with the ḍamaru.

It marks the most powerful horizontal of the whole composition. This line extending from the hand with the ḍamaru to the hand with the snake runs through three of the four vertical space-divisions.

C′-E = marks the level of the drums and the drum-player's shoulders, and passes below the arms of the flute player, through the groin of Mahākāla to the wrists and the groin of Pārvatī and the head of the dwarf.

The subdivisions are less important:

d′-c = marks the lower limit of the ram's head, of Śiva's garland falling on his arm and of his hand holding the snake.
c′-d = marks the top of the drum-player's headdress, Śiva's left knee and the breastline of Pārvatī.
F′-B = runs from the bracket between the bodies and legs of the Śārdūlas and across the top of Śiva's jaṭāmukuṭa and the top of the paraśu.
e′-b = the intermediate chord, marks the heads of the Dikpālas to the right and the shoulders of the Dikpālas to the left. In the centre it marks the horizontal of Śiva's brow, the blade of the paraśu and the pravartita hasta, which are both in symmetrical correspondence on either side of Śiva's head.
b′-e = the lowest intermediate chord marks the upper level of Śiva's pedestal. On the right it passes below Mahākāla's knee and the drum-player's elbow, and on the left it marks the shoulder of the infant, Pārvatī's knees and the waist of the dwarf. The elbows of the drummer and of the dwarf are on one line.

The space below this line is filled with vertical form-elements which, touching one another, constitute, so to say, a lateral extension of the pedestal that supports Śiva.

If we divide the panel along the two verticals F′-B′ and B-F and along the two horizontals E′-C and D′-D, we obtain a cross that contains all essential features of the two central figures of Śiva and Mahākāla, and separate them from the lateral groups, which, except for the figure of Agni, are confined into four rectangles in the four corners. The rectangles of the upper corners are smaller and contain the brackets and the Dikpālas, those in the lower corners are bigger and contain the group of Pārvatī and the dwarf on the left side and that of the musicians on the right. By their relative compactness and stability these four groups restrain the centrifugal energy of Śiva's figure on all sides. This has free sway only within the central space of the cross.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XIXb

Essential diameters: F′-F′ and C-C′ standing at right angles.

Complementary diameters: B′-B and E′-E, also at right angles.

F-F′ = from Pārvatī's foot upwards along the body of her child, the hand of Mahākāla, Śiva's right shoulder, the edge of the paraśu to the front of the right bracket.
A′-E′ = from the centre of the base to the tip of Śiva's right foot, the shoulder of the karatāla-player, across Śiva's hand holding the paraśu and the figure of Agni.
E-A = up from Pārvatī's shoulder and head, through Śiva's patāka and tripatāka-hastas to the left top of his mukuṭa.

The two intermediate parallels are more important:

e-f′ = rises from the left lower corner, as axis through Pārvatī's left thigh and through Śiva's torso, in its sideway thrust from left to right.
f-e′ = rises from the lower left corner of the pedestal, forms the axis of Śiva's right shank, of Mahākāla's body and head and of Śiva's right forearm holding the ḍamaru. Along the front of Indra and the last figure on the bracket it ends in the upper corner of the panel.

Śiva's right shank and arm run parallel with the sway of the body, they double and emphasize the direction of its movement. Further out on both sides the parallels have less importance. They echo only in minor formelements the general trend of this diameter.

Complementary diameters:

B-B′ = from the front-edge of the left bracket through the wrists of the pravartita and tripatāka-hastas to the knee of Mahākāla and the foot of the drum-player. This line has little importance, but its outer parallels are vital nerve-lines.
A-C′ = from the centre top of the panel along the outer contour of Śiva's right arms down to the shoulder of the drummer. Running in the channel of shade behind Śiva's arms, it directs the long and powerful line of the paraśu.
A′-C = from the central base of the panel up through the channel of shade

between Śiva's left shank and the figure of Pārvatī, it touches the fingertips of the patāka-hasta and ends in the hand with the snake. As Śiva's upper right outline was determined by A-C′, so his left lower outline is determined by A′-C, and so is the slant of Pārvatī's figure from the head of the child to the top of her headdress, extended into the hood of the hanging snake.

Also the intermediate diameters are quite important:

a-b′ = along the yajñopavīta on Śiva's shoulder and the inner contour of his right arms, along the shoulder of Mahākāla, the head of the karatāla-player, the forearm of the drummer to the right lower corner of the panel. The powerful forms of Śiva's right arms are enclosed between this line and A-C′.

b-a′ = from the upper left corner of the panel along Nirṛti and his vāhana, along the inner side of Śiva's left shank to his right foot and to both the feet of Mahākāla. As are his arms on the other side, so here Śiva's left shank is enclosed between the subsidiary and the main chord C-A'.

The next two secondary parallels have a certain importance:

f-c = determines the slant of Pārvatī's body from her hip upwards, including her right arm and the arms of the child.

c′-f′ = determines the reach of the paraśu's blade and of the hand with the ḍamaru, as also the forward slant of the Dikpāla groups.

If the sway of Śiva's torso from left to right is the strongest movement of the whole composition, the complementary slants of Śiva's right arms, left shank and the paraśu are not inconspicuous, followed up as they are by other parallel slants, as for instance Pārvatī's body and the alignment of flute-player and drummer. In these complementary movements, spread over the whole panel, the big thrust of Śiva's body swings out and finds a balancing counterweight.

The primary impulsion of the entire movement, however, is given by the diameter C-C′, which stands at right angles to F-F′.

C-C′ = from the lower outer edge of the Dikpāla group on the left, it forms the axis of Śiva's right thigh and directs the thrust from his left hip to his right knee, prolonged in the shoulders of Mahākāla, and continued through the heads of the flute-player and the drummer.

No antagonism, no tension can be stronger than that between two lines crossing at right angles, and here the focal centre and hub of the whole movement lies at the cross formed by the lines of the hips and right thigh and the line of the torso. The thigh swings out perpendicularly from the mighty curve of the body, and this first disruption of balance is the very act, by which the dance is initiated and set into motion.

Also minor forms on this line, above and below it, like the drapery on Śiva's left hip, his waistband and his right hand resting on the thigh (dotted lines) emphasise this transversal direction. So does the line across his left elbows, which divides the four arms in two lower and two upper ones, and the descending sequence from the head of Mahākāla to those of the flute-player and the drummer.

B-D′ = the upper parallel, marks the corresponding slant from Śiva's pravartita hasta to his right shoulder, following the inclination of his body.
A-E′ = concludes this movement by descending from the top of the paraśu across the right group of Dikpālas in the direction of their alignment.
D-B′ = from Pārvatī's left shoulder to Śiva's right foot and to the foot of the drummer.
E-A′ = from the shoulder of the dwarf, in the direction of Pārvatī's left shank through the waist of the child to the centre bottom of the panel.

More important than all these are the intermediate parallels b-c′ and c-b′.

b-c′ = comes down along the knees of the second Dikpāla to the left, across the wrist of Śiva's tripatāka hasta to form the axis of his forearm holding the paraśu, which is following and carrying still further the sideway drive shown in the thigh.
a-d′ = marks the downward slant from the round ornament on Śiva's headdress to his hand with the ḍamaru and the head of Agni's vāhana.
c-b′ = shows the slant from the head of the snake hanging from Śiva's left hand to the loop of the snake-belt on his hip, to the wrist of Mahākāla's extended hand and the elbow and knee of the drummer. Between this line and the diameter C-C′ lie the lower contour of Śiva's right thigh and the arm of the flute-player. And between this line and the lower parallel D-B′ lies the right thigh of Mahākāla, exactly parallel to the thigh of Śiva.
d-a′ = runs along the slant of Pārvatī's left forearm, the head of her child down to the right foot of Mahākāla.

Also this movement has a balancing complementary movement in the diameter E-E′ and its parallels. Their movement runs upwards instead of downwards.

E-E′ = from the head of the dwarf across Pārvatī's elbow and waist to Śiva's right arm resting on the thigh of which it forms the axis. Then it divides Agni from Indra along the line of his shoulders and the horns of his ram.
D-F′ = from the head of the hanging snake along the line of Śiva's daṇḍa and tripatāka hastas to the upper rim of the paraśu-blade and the front of the bracket.
C-A = forms the axis of the sideway extension of the left group of Dikpālas.
F-D′ = from Pārvatī's right ankle along the instep of Śiva's left foot, through the groin of Mahākāla and the heads of the musicians to the lower end of the paraśu.
A′-C′ = from the bottom of the panel to the shoulder of the drummer. As on the other side the shank of Pārvatī, here the drummer's upper arm is rounded into the directing circle.

In these complementary lines also some of the intermediate chords are more important.

d-e′ = from Pārvatī's brow to the tip of Śiva's hand holding the ḍamaru and the inner corner of the right bracket.

It is the axis of the major sideway extension of Śiva's body, from his left hip to his right shoulder, and is thus an exact counterpart of the stress operating along the axis C-C′ from the left hip to the right knee. The two lines cross one another in the middle of Śiva's hip, at the exact point where they are both hinged to the vertical of the left thigh.

c-f′ = shows the ascent from the upper contour of Śiva's hand holding the snake to the lower line of his pravartita-hasta up to the point of the paraśu, an ascent of outlines.

e-d′ = below the centre, from the left knee of Pārvatī across the shoulder of the imp to the right knee of Śiva, the shoulder of Mahākāla and the upper limit of the hand holding the paraśu. This line connects the shoulders of imp and Mahākāla and the bent knees of both Pārvatī and Śiva. Mahākāla's outstretched arm lies above it in the same direction.

f-c′ = from the lower left edge of the pedestal to the tip of Śiva's right foot, the knee of Mahākāla, the face of the drum, the elbow of the flute-player and the drummer's head, connecting in a sequence a number of prominent edges.

We have to note a few general geometrical configurations resulting from all the diameters used in both Space- and Time-divisions, which have perhaps more to do with Space-division than with movement. But since they involve oblique directions as well, it was better to explain them only after these have been analysed. (Plates XIXb and c)

The outermost parallels of the diameters C-C′ and E-E′ together with the outermost verticals form a regular hexagon, connecting the points A C E A′ C′ E′ into which the entire composition is enclosed.

The parallels on either side of the diameters B-B′ and F-F′ issuing from points A and A′ form two intersecting triangles, which circumscribe all essential features of Śiva's figure. The upright triangle, A-E-C′, has its vertex above Śiva's head and its base at the line cutting off the lower portion of the panel at the level of the drums. The inverted triangle, A′-E′-C, has its vertex at the base of the pedestal, where the directions of Śiva's legs converge, and its base along the horizontal line of his shoulders and arms. The first triangle marks a movement spreading downward from Śiva's head along his right arms and his left flank, to the sides of the panel. The second marks an opposite movement spreading upward from Śiva's feet along his legs and outermost hands to the level of his shoulders. Interpenetrating one another they form a hexagram, which captures the figure of Śiva, not in a static sense as the vertical-horizontal division of the cross shown before, but in the sense of its dynamism. It reveals the upward and downward, reversible currents of energy working in his body, which cross and interpenetrate one another in an unending flux. The central, vital core of this movement is circumscribed within an upright parallelogram at the centre of the hexagram, reaching from its uppermost to its lowest point. This parallelogram consists of two equilateral triangles addorsed at their bases and embodies the same cross-trends of movement, less their sideway extensions. Because the flow of energy works in both senses, the movement can be considered as either opening downwards from Śiva's head to the middle of his body, and converging from there towards the feet and the pedestal, or, in the opposite way, as opening from the feet upward to the middle and converging and culminating in the head.

The extended outlines of this parallelogram cut out isosceles triangles in the four corners of the panel, which are occupied by the extended arms of Śiva and the accessory groups. Although these peripheral groups are confined and limited within well-defined geometrical spaces, they are connected with the central figure by the correspondence of their space-directions, and by the reception and absorption of dynamic stresses projected from it.

Besides the cross, the hexagon, the hexagram and the parallelogram, the figure of Śiva can also be inscribed into a square, standing obliquely on one of its points, as if balancing its weight on it. The four corners of this square embrace all four extreme projections of Śiva's figure, which were cut out by one or the other of the previous geometrical circumscriptions. The basic angle, which supports the weight of the body is at the left foot, the second to the right at the lower end of the paraśu, the third above at the upper end of the paraśu, and the fourth to the left at the outstretched hand with the snake. The tilt of the square, balancing on one point, is in accordance with Śiva's posture and suggestive of the labile balance of a body in the evolution of a dance.

In this sculpture of the dancing Śiva all six essential diameters (or space-directions) are participating in the lay-out with subtly graded emphasis. Although charged with dynamism, the body of Śiva is not swerved from a relative equipoise. The antagonistic stresses drawing his limbs apart in opposite directions are balanced and integrated into a perfectly harmonious rhythm.

In the central parallelogram Śiva's immanent energy is compressed into a powerful double curve winding its way upward from his feet to his head, alternately controlled by one or the other side of the parallelogram. From the left foot anchored on the pedestal the movement rises up and outward to the knee, from there vertically through the thigh to the hip, and then swings over to the other side through the chest and shoulders. Here the energy, welling up from below, is arrested and collected into the horizontal expanse of shoulders and arms. The daṇḍahasta, close against the chest, compresses this energy and throws it into the outspread arms. Through the arms it flows out on both sides, and by the forearms opening crosswise from the elbows it is projected in all directions of space.

The head of Śiva, held firmly aloft in the centre, is dominating the whole display, as the unmoved Mover.

Movement is a notion relative to immobility, and it does not come into evidence, unless it is set off against a background of quiescence. Motion arises from stillness, and again subsides into it. This is as true in the physical world of nature as it is in pictorial and plastic representation. In a painting or sculpture, movement will never look convincing, unless it is set against antagonistic elements of reference. It is either by contrast with stable and unmoving forms, giving a substratum of rest and balance, or by an object towards which its impetus is directed, or by the check of opposite stresses, that the representation of movement will become visually effective. In the absence of such contrasting, restraining or directing elements, movement will run out ineffectively, or remain frozen in space as an empty gesture. The inner circulation, which constitutes its life, and which is kept active by the force of restraint, will be paralysed and suspended.

Of this fundamental law the ancient Indian sculptors were intensely aware, and their mode of operation can be studied in anyone of their works. To keep a movement alive and going, they always conceived it in its relation to rest and never failed, even in the representation of violent action, to set it off against composed and restful form-elements, or against antagonistic stresses, or at least to refer it to some central stabilizing lines. The deeper reason for this lies in the fact that the representation of movement did not mean to them, as it does to the moderns, a single movement caught like a snapshot, cut out form the context of an evolving continuous action. To them it always meant a simultaneous vision of the entire evolution of a performance, with all its salient and characteristic moments, its beginning, unfolding and subsiding, condensed and compounded into one single trajectory or one full cycle. By thus rounding into one synthetic curve the time-succession of its evolutionary phases, they achieved the feat of keeping the action flowing in an unending circuit, where nothing is ever at a standstill, but all movements are endlessly reborn from one another.

These were not mere theoretical postulates or clever artistic devices, but resulted from their whole philosophic and artistic orientation. These artists were not concerned with the outward aspects of life, with the merely phenomenal, with visual impressions or the expression of personal feelings. Their vision probed deeper into the fundamental, timeless processes that involve cosmic and human existence in the unending cycle of birth, growth and decay, and in the eternal struggle between spirit and matter, and the forces of light and darkness. To this comprehensive and transcendental vision, which was the fountain-head of their life and thought, they strove to give adequate expression in the language of form.

In the present image, the movement that is flowing out evenly in all directions is not confronted with opposite stresses. The check and control of the movement comes not from without, but from within, from the centre of Śiva's body. And the surrounding groups only give a gentle, quiet framing to the outlines of his figure. This dancing Śiva is complete in itself, and does not require any outside elements to make it a rounded whole. One can imagine it not only as a relief in its present form, but as a freestanding figure as well. The control of its outgoing movements is incorporated in all vertical form-elements in Śiva's own body. While the erect head stands for the spiritual mastery of the whole display of this cosmic dance, the verticals of the pedestal with Mahākāla's raised leg, of Śiva's left thigh and left forearms and of the garland falling on his breast are the forces that work the control on the physical plane. They keep the outward thrust of his arms and his right leg in check and break the continuous movements into a cadenced rhythm, delicately arresting and reversing their flow, and leading it back towards its centre and origin. Thus, throughout the body of Śiva, moving circuits are created, which flow into one another, continuing and fulfilling one another's beginnings.

Consider the irregular quadrangle formed by Śiva's legs. The energy that is mounting through the left leg into the sway of the body is, at the level of the hip, thrown out by the right thigh and then brought back to its point of departure through the bend of this leg and the foot beating the rhythm. The energy welling up into the shoulders is pressed outwards on both sides, enforced by the arm thrown across the chest. But at the elbows on either side it is held up and diverted into different directions. Of the two left forearms standing in the vertical, the pravartita-hasta pointing upward is leading it back to the head of Śiva, and the patāka-hasta going down is, through the head of the snake-belt, leading it back to the left thigh. The tripatāka-hasta, turned inward, is reversing the flow towards Śiva's chest, while the extended arm holding a snake is gently dropping it into the curve of Pārvatī's body, who in her turn leads it back to the base of the pedestal. On the right side the thrust of the arms is oblique and not horizontal, and therefore the right-angled bend at the elbows also lies on an oblique line. The energy thrown out by these right upper arms is also split up into different currents. Through the arm resting on the thigh it is turned back and closed into one circuit with that of the legs. Through the arm holding the ḍamaru it is turned up- and inward towards the right shoulder. The lower arm going outward holds the long straight staff of the paraśu, as a formidable barrier, which restrains the outflow of energy and raises it up towards Śiva's head. By its long line running parallel to the arm, the paraśu closes the framework of the entire circuit.

Although the figure of Śiva stands entirely selfcontained in the balance of its movements and does not require checks from outside, the groups surrounding it in the four corners, by conforming to its sway, and by receiving and absorbing fractions of its outgoing energy give it a harmonious fulfilment. At the same time, through their vertical trends, they mediate between the dynamism of Śiva's figure and the architectural frame-work into which it is cast.

INTEGRATION AND INTERPRETATION

"In the Night of Brahmā, Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Śiva wills it. He rises from his rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsating waves of awakening sound, and lo! matter also dances, appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, He destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest".

The Dance of Śiva by A. K. Coomaraswamy, Siddhānta Dīpikā, Vol. XIII. July 1912

Dance in every form is a progression of rhythmic movement delineating itself in space and evolving in time. Dance is a measured sequence born of both categories, space and time, which essentially constitute this world of manifestation. Therefore dance is the prototype of universal creative activity. The whole of the universe is a display of life-movement, emerging and dissolving according to the alternating time-phases of birth and death, of evolution and involution.

In dance the self is evolving and revolving around its own essence. The movement of a dance is self-impelled and self-contained, it has no purpose and no reference to anything outside itself. It creates a moving pattern by unfolding its own form, and while the pattern is incessantly changing and transmuting itself, its essence remains unchanged. Thus the dance of Śiva represents the operation of the Cosmic Essence, the Brahman, displaying Itself as form and movement in the phenomena of the universe, without ceasing to be the immutable essence and centre of Its own display.

"Being formless, He brought forth His own form by His Līlā—a form possessed of all divine powers and qualities, auspicious and beneficent".

(Śiva-Mahāpurāṇa, Sṛṣṭikhanda)

In the plastic conception of Śiva's dance both the aspects of immanence and manifestation, which are eternally fulfilling his infinite Being, are necessarily and implicitly contained. Śiva, the essence (Cit) and Śakti, the causal stress, are combined into one. Even when Śakti is absent from the representation, the union of both is implied in the very performance of his dance. Without Śakti Śiva cannot dance. To stress this fact and his indissoluble union with Śakti, he is wearing two earrings, one of a male and the other of a female. His double essence, consisting of the one static, unfathomable, attributeless centre of Being, and of the dynamic, creative power of manifestation is brought into a perfect synthesis within his one single Person.

The symbolism of Śiva's dance includes the three aspects or phases of his activity, of his Līlā, as it is called in order to emphasize the purposeless bliss, in which the supreme Self fulfills the infinite potentialities of his Being. In the cosmic order they represent the recurring and simultaneous creation, maintainance and dissolution of the universe, the eternal procession, transformation and re-absorption of manifestation (Sṛṣṭi, Sthiti, Saṁhāra). In the human order they refer to the jīvātman, who is thrown forth into the entanglements of existence, and after long wanderings through saṁsāra, is finally released from bondage and reabsorbed into the supreme Essence (Tirobhāva and Anugraha)[1].

All the multiple aspects of this dance symbolism are implicitly contained in anyone of Śiva's dance-images, but in the great variety of attitudes and modes of his dance, particular aspects of the symbolism are singled out for representation. In those earlier periods no two Naṭarāja images are quite alike.

The dancing Śiva under consideration is all restrained tension, concentrated energy and power. Primal, vital energy, which lay dormant, is rising and throbbing through his whole body, slowly, heavily disentangling his limbs. Deep dark joy is welling up through his entire being. From a vertical quiescent stand his form is thrown into a lateral sway and is breaking up into curves and angles of dynamic stress. The urge to create, projected from the centre of Śiva's body is impelling the dance and flowing forth into all directions of space. It is dawn, the awakening of creation.

From the ḍamaru in Śiva's right upper hand Nāda (Spandana), first, primordial sound is vibrating, awakening the world of beings from the slumber of the Unmanifest, setting into motion the process of evolution or emanation (Pariṇāma). Impulses and stresses are arising in the undifferentiated whole. Vital energy is pulsating and radiating from certain centres of stress in concentric waves. Out of the one Great Being, Life is forming its thousand million limbs, and the cycle of existence begins its course.

The whole background of the panel is set into motion. It is heaving and sinking in heavy waves, and the bodies emerging from the ground are rounding themselves into plastic shapes without detaching themselves from the stone, from the primordial substance from which they are born. They remain embedded and intimately bound up with it. Background-space and figures are, as it were, of one and the same substance, and the Devas in the heavenly regions appear as if wrapped in atmosphere and melting away into the depths of space. Just as Creation is a process of division and delimitation, resulting in individuation, space is here represented as dividing itself into portions, some positive and some negative, some swelling and forming themselves into bodies and some sagging and remaining as fluid interspaces. There are no hollow depths, and all divisions, formed or unformed, are integral parts of surface modulation. Thus in the plastic treatment itself Śiva is conceived as being, not outside the world-substance, but as stirring it from inside and causing it to break forth into an endless efflux of forms.

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[1] For further elucidation of the dance symbolism see: The Dance of Śiva, by Ānanda Coomaraswamy, in Siddhānta Dīpikā, Vol. XIII, July 1912, reprinted in Gopinatha Rao, Hindu Iconography, Vol. II, Part I. pp. 231 and foll.

All around Śiva appear, as effective emanations of his dance, the world of the Devas above the clouds and the world of creatures below his feet. Behind the whole display, and born with it is the seed of death, small and inconspicuous, Mahākāla, the Lord of Time, Śiva's alter ego, mocking the glory of creation in a parody of the cosmic dance, stepping with one foot on Śiva's pedestal, eager to take his part and certain of his ultimate triumph. But crowning and governing this whole display of expanding life and form, Śiva's head stands erect and still, abiding in unclouded consciousness and bliss.

In the composition of this sculpture outgoing dynamism is perfectly blended with self-centred quiescence. The two complementary operations, which constitute the life of all that exists, are brought into a synthetic unity. The static and the dynamic aspects are interwoven into one another, and while remaining distinct, they fulfil each other.

The two intersecting triangles into which the figure of Śiva is inscribed form together the Ṣaṭkoṇa, the six-edged star, which in Tāntric symbolism represents the union of Śiva and Śakti in Sāmarasya, when, prior to the display of manifestation, both are one in perfect equipoise and balance. Here, the inverted triangle, the active, the Śakti triangle is filled to the brim with dynamic, creative stresses and contains all centres or vortices of energy. But the one point of repose, the head of Śiva, is outside its orbit. The upright triangle, the Śiva triangle, on the other hand, has the head of Śiva as its vertex. This represents supreme Consciousness, controlling the whole display from its central, commanding position.

Inside the central parallelogram, which unites the vertices of both the Śiva and the Śakti triangles, the contained energy of Śiva is winding its way upward from the feet to the head in a powerful double curve. The lower half of this double curve is swinging from the left foot through the left leg to the navel, and its upper half is swinging in the opposite sense from the navel through the chest to the head.

In Śakti Tantra the double curve is the abstract sign for Icchā-Śakti, the first of the three Śaktis into which the Ghanībhūta-bindu divides itself in the process of creative evolution. She is the Śakti of World-desire, World-ideation, pregnant with the urge for life and creation. Here this abstract line is clad in flesh and blood, and transfigured into a billowing plastic form, which admirably expresses its symbolic meaning. The abstract symbol assumes a formidable reality, embodying the primordial stir of life, which moves the Supreme Being to explicate himself into the manifold forms of the universe.

If this double curve of Icchā Śakti be divided in two and considered as growing out in two branches from a central point, its two halves will form two arms of a Svastika bent in opposite directions. On laying another double curve perpendicularly across the central point, that is, on doubling the Icchā Śakti, the figure of the Svastika is completed. The Svastika suggests a movement of rotation around a fixed centre, and it is well known that this sign has been universally used, from the remotest times of human history, to signify the revolution of the World-wheel, of the Cosmic Cycle, or the Great Year. Since it is a symbol for cosmic procession and evolution, it is perhaps not very surprising to find it so closely related to the symbol of Icchā Śakti, and be, as a matter of fact, a double Icchā Śakti.

Yoginīhṛdaya Tantra says: "When the supreme Power (Paramā-Śakti) who is in the form of the Universe (Viśvarūpiṇī) sees her own impulse towards becoming (sphurattā) then the cakra comes into being".

In this dance of Śiva the centre of the double bend, the centre of stress is around Śiva's hip and navel. From the middle of this bend his right leg is swinging out at right angles, in the position of one cross-bar of the Svastika. The driving power collected between the two hips is projected outwards through the right leg, and up- and downward through the trunk and the left leg. These three branches or currents stand out from the centre like three spokes of a wheel and a rotating movement going forth from the centre of his body comes into being. The centrifugal impact of this movement is so powerful, that the arms on both sides are flung out and leave an empty space around the central vortex. The movement is propelled in widening circles, creating new centres of rotation on either side. From Śiva's right and left elbows the forearms are thrown out cross-wise, and as they sharply bend their hands from their wrists, they show an obvious similarity to the arms of a Svastika. On the right side three hands are bent clockwise and the upper branch of the Svastika is formed by the upper arm and shoulder. On the left side the hands are bent towards one another two by two, but in an anthropomorphic image such a departure from the original design is not always avoidable and would not perhaps invalidate the symbolism of its figuration.[1]

Rotation always involves the conception of propulsion, of centrifugal expansion going forth in all directions from a mathematical point of stability, and in this way conveys a dynamic image of Cosmic Life, which is concentrated as potentiality in the immovable centre of the Supreme Being, and from there goes forth as manifested existence. The primal Energy, Ādyā Śakti is whirling herself into the substance that is going to form the manifested Universe. In the symbolism of the Samudramanthanam (Churning of the Ocean) the process of creation is similarly conceived in terms of rotation. The churning stick, the Mountain Mandara, is whirling up the ocean of possibilities, first in one sense and then in the other, according to whether the pull is given by the Devas or the Asuras. This goes to represent the alternate phases of evolution and involution. And when modern science on the material plane discovered that all matter is animate, it attributed to a rotating vortex the birth of stars as well as that of the infinitesimal atoms, which constitute the universe.

In this image of Śiva, wheels appear to be moving within wheels. If the central cross of Śiva's body be considered as the centre of life-generation, the unfolding of forms from this central vortex with three branches to new vortices with four branches, gives a suggestive illustration of the process of evolution and multiplication, that fills the universe with life.

The three branches of the central Svastika might then be meant to signify the three Guṇas: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, which underlie and constitute the substance of all creation. Śiva's left leg pointing downward would stand for Tamoguṇa, his right thigh raised towards the horizontal for Rajoguṇa, and the trunk and head pointing upward for Sattvaguṇa. By the side of Tamoguṇa is Pārvatī in her Prakṛti aspect as a mother with her child, accompanied by an imp and a dwarf, spirits of the earth, to represent the world of organic creation. By the side of Rajoguṇa are three musicians, playing on three different kinds of instruments, to represent the world of sound, the awakening of consciousness, of will

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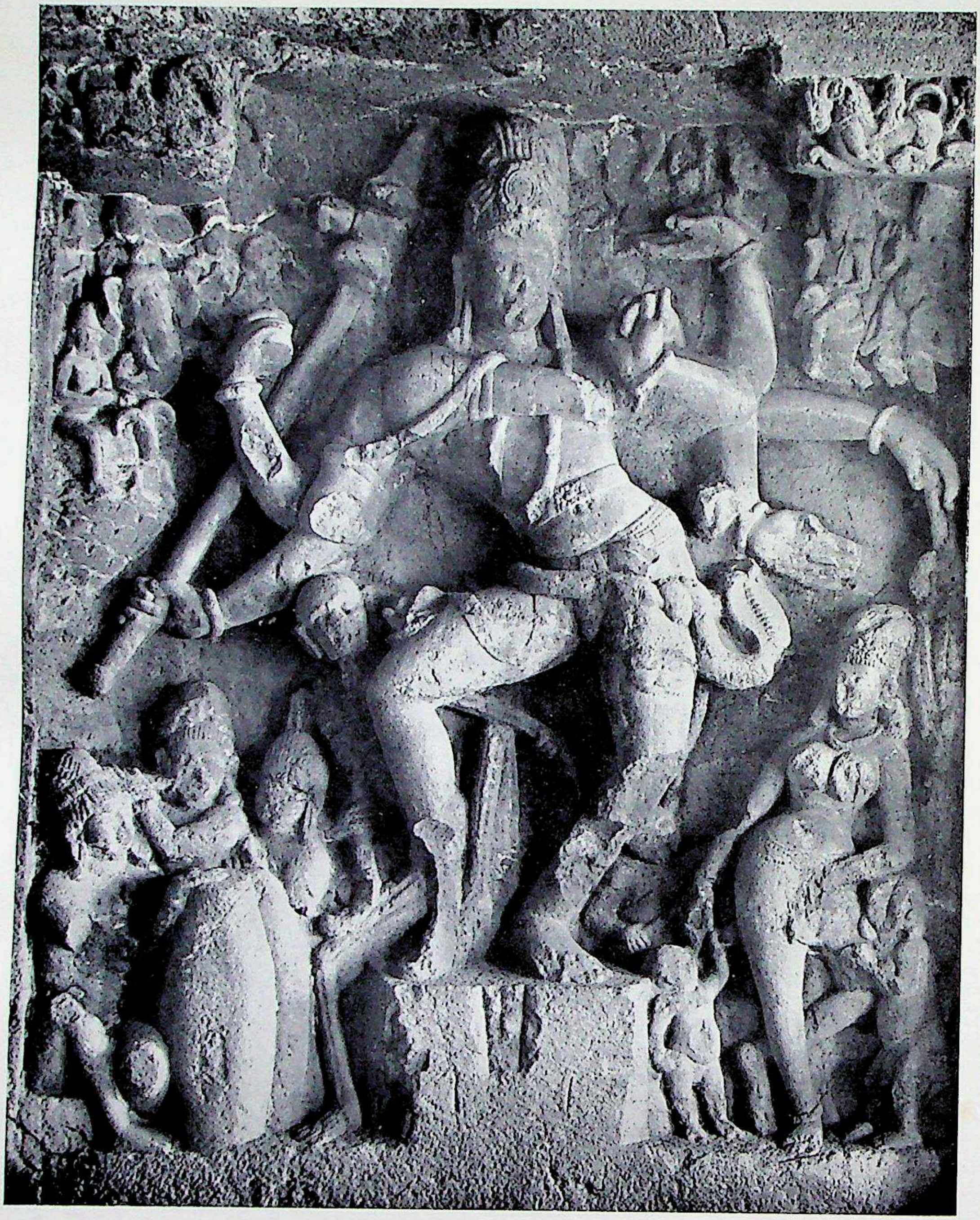
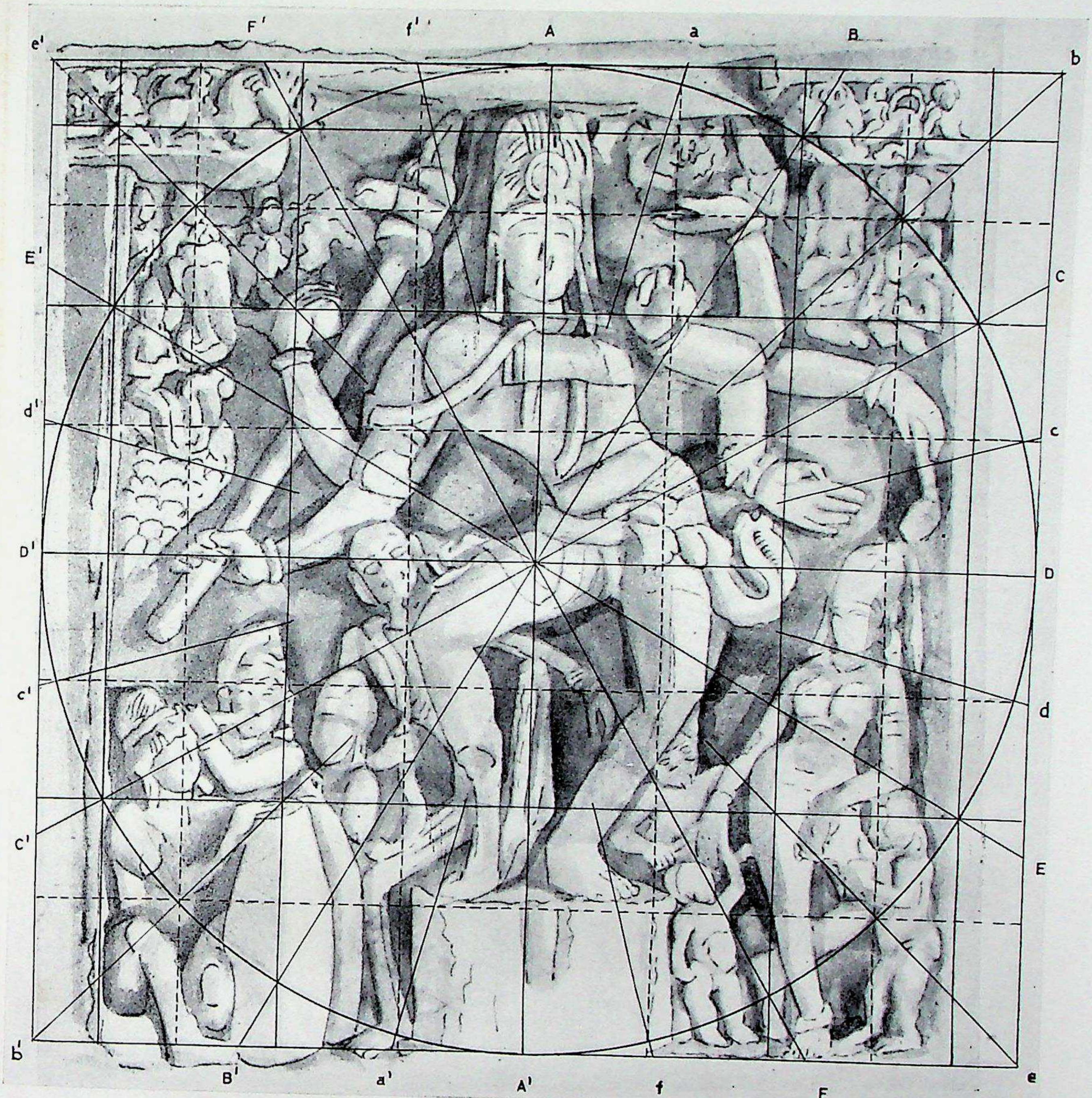
[1] It is sometimes represented in this way in order to show the rotating movement as seen from the two opposite poles. (René Guénon: Le Symbolisme de la Croix, p. 98).

PLATE XIX

State Museum Library * Lucknow *



ŚIVA NAṬARĀJA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XIV


e'
F'
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C
d'
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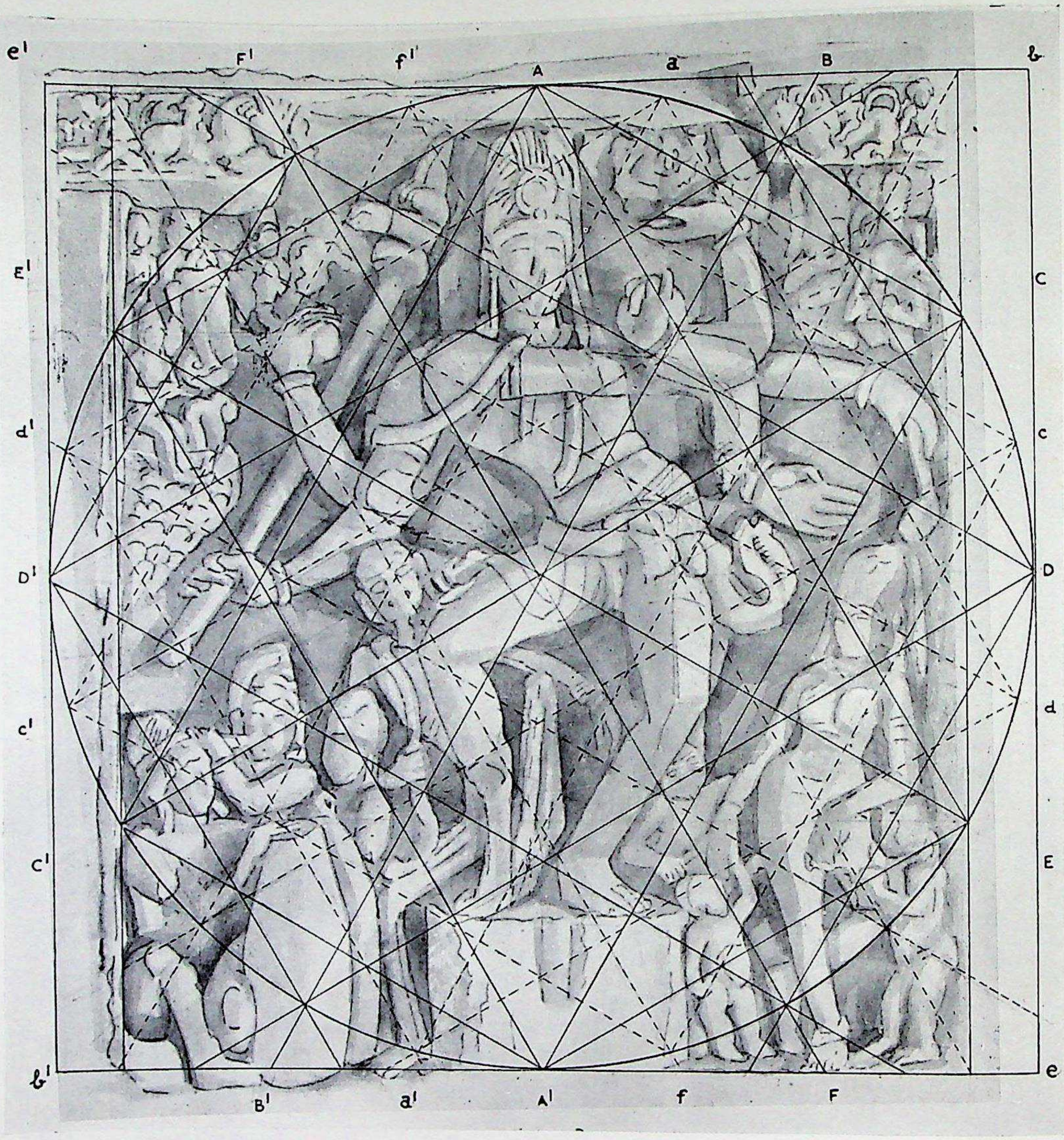
a. SPACE DIVISION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F¹
f¹
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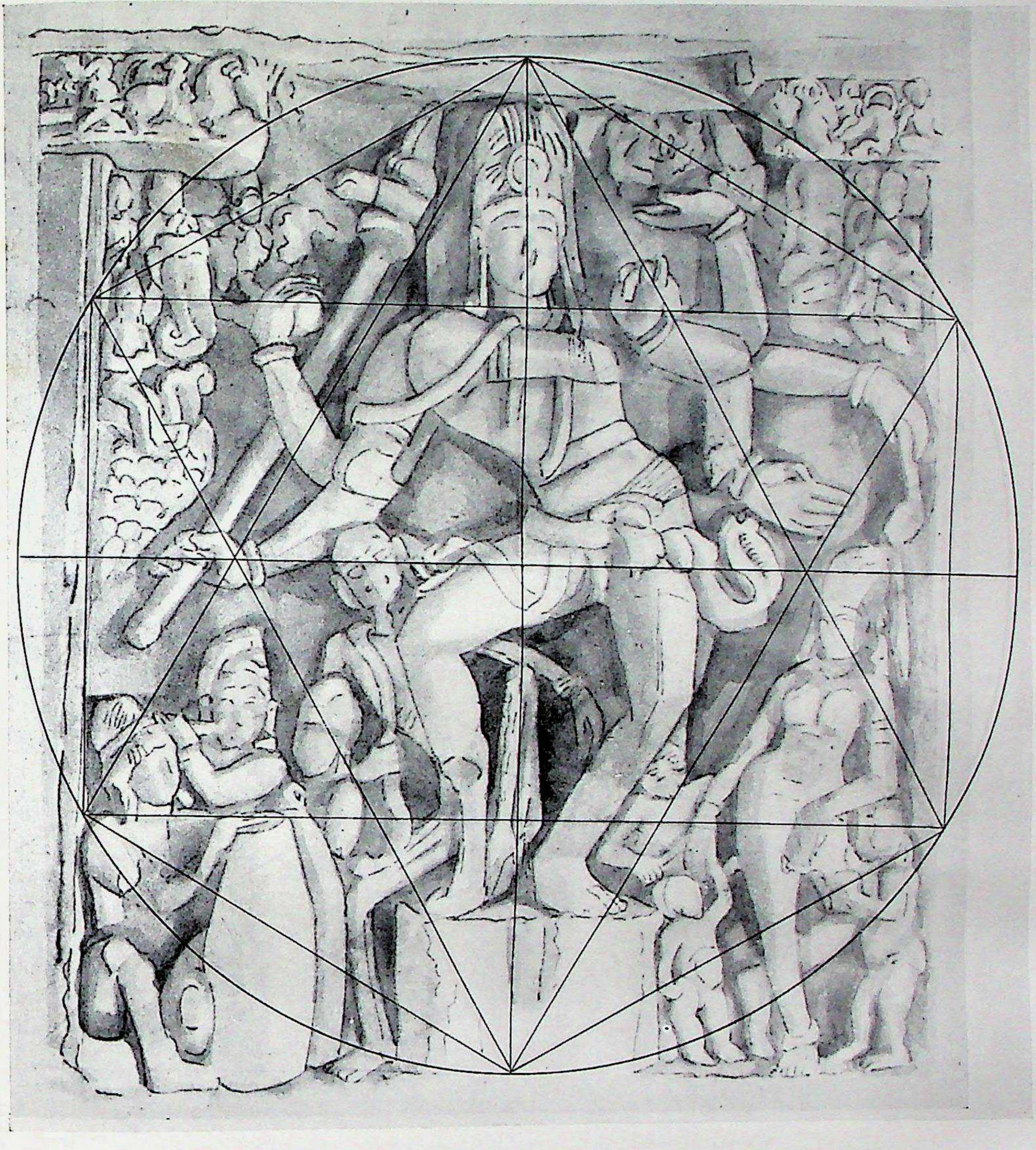
b. TIME DIVISION



c. HEXAGRAM

and of feeling. All around Sattvaguṇa is the spiritual world of the Devas, floating on clouds in the ether of the Infinite.[1]

Although a detailed interpretation of the various elements of such a complex and significant composition must for the present remain a subject for speculation, its fundamental idea may be summarised thus:-

Life-creation is here emanating from a central vortex and is propagating itself through secondary centres, involving the whole surface or space in a continuum of movement. It is Life springing from Life, or as the Tantra says: "It is a process in which one flame springs from another flame. Hence it is called 'Flame to Flame'.[2] Śiva, the Supreme, is resolving Himself through his dance, which is the play of Śakti, into the world of Manifestation. Śiva is spreading Himself, and appearing as all manifested forms, as all Jīvas, which are only parts and fragments of Himself. "All is Śiva, whether as subject or as object."[3] The world-procession, in the primal phase is permeated by the youthful exultation of budding and expanding life. All created beings joyfully participate in the pervading rhythm of the dance, in spite of the background reference to its final dissolution. Only Śiva's head with the high mukuṭa stands erect and unmoved in the very centre-line of gravity, as the pillar of the universe in the form of the Liṅgam, the immovable, unchangeable and indestructible substratum of all existence. In its perfect equipoise, its vertical axis points through the whole composition and makes it stable. The vertical of the head, through the garland falling on Śiva's breast and the raised leg of Mahākāla drops like an anchor-line into the pedestal holding the entire movement firm. Cit or Consciousness is unaffected by the process of evolution. It abides in eternal peace, lucidity and integrity, although worlds may emanate from it and be resolved into it. "The World-Thinker retains his supreme undual Consciousness even in Creation."[4] He is Svarūpa still, in spite of displaying Viśvarūpa.

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[1] For Guṇa symbolism, see: René Guénon: Le Symbolisme de la Croix, p. 59 and foll.

[2] Woodroffe: Shakti and Shākta, p. 280.

[3] Ibid., p. 281.

[4] Ibid., p. 346.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ŚIVA NAṬARĀJA

(VIGHNEŚA TĀṆḌAVA)

BĀDĀMĪ, LATE 6TH CENT.

PLATE XX

Śiva is standing on a square lotus-pedestal, in the kuṭṭitam pose. He has an odd number of arms, seventeen in all. Eight are on either side, and the daṇḍa-hasta, which is thrown across the chest and thus belongs to both sides, is the seventeenth. With his two uppermost hands he holds a snake above his head. In one of the right hands he holds the ḍamaru, and in two others small objects, of which one looks like a ring and the other like an akṣamālā. With three of his left hands he holds a triśūla and a paraśu. All other hands make different significant gestures. Nandī stands behind the pedestal in side view, while his head and forelegs are in front-view at the right. Gaṇeśa stands on the other side of the pedestal, and a drum-player with his instruments at the extreme left.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XXa

The panel is an upright rectangle, with a bulge in the left lower corner to contain the drummer. Its height is indicated by the upper corner of the outer frame on the right side of the panel and is equal to the height from its base to the top of Śiva's halo. The enclosing circle is divided by twelve diameters, which are marked with capital and small letters as principal and intermediate diameters. But in this panel some of the intermediate diameters have a primary importance, because they determine space-directions.

Verticals

Madhya sūtra = on the line dividing Śiva's cheek from his left ear, on the line of his armlet and of the garland falling on his thigh down to the point of his left foot and the edge of the pedestal. Śiva's body is on the right side of the centre-line.

F′-B′ = from the right hand raised with the snake, through the right elbow, hand and knee to the right edge of the pedestal.

B-F = along the whole length of the triśūla and the outer limit of the drum.

Between these two lines the whole of Śiva's figure is contained as far as the inner, reversed arms, and besides him, the figure of Gaṇeśa. But the subdivisions f′-a′ and a-f also mark very important articulations.

f′-a′ = along the right side of the halo and a long piece of drapery descending from Śiva's chest between his legs down to his right calf.

Between this line and the madhya-sūtra the centre of Śiva's figure is contained, with his head and headdress, the middle of his body and his left foot vertically set. These together form the central axis of the image, although they are not in the centre of the panel. The interspace between f′-a′ and F′-B′ holds all the upper right arms, the reversed forearm in full, and almost the entire right leg.

a-f = from the top of the raised left hand, through the wrists of the second and fourth bent arm and along the elbow of the third bent arm, this line ends as the axis of Gaṇeśa's body.

As it limits the reach of the first bent elbow on the left side, it is a counterpart to the line F′-B′ on the other side, which limits the right elbow of the tripatāka hasta. This however is only an inner articulation. The main stress lies on the three elbows reversed along the line B-F, corresponding with the staff of the triśūla.

b-e = marks the limit of the three extended forearms of Śiva, the face of the drummer and the line between his two drums. The interspace holds the three outer hands of Śiva, two holding the staff of the paraśu, and below the standing drum.

C-E = marks the outer limit of the panel, less the bulge at the lower end. The interspace holds the top of the paraśu and the middle of the drum-player's body with his drum.

e′-b′ = from the hand of the upper daṇḍa-hasta, through hands and wrists of four outstretched arms down along the hump, head and leg of Nandī. The interspace holds the head of the snake, six right forearms and the front of the bull.

E′-C′ = marks the outer limit of the panel. The interspace holds Śiva's outermost hands and the right side of Nandī.

The vertical space divisions in this composition are marked by long vertical form-elements such as Śiva's garland, his drapery, the staff of the triśūla, the standing drum, the legs of Nandī and the edges of the pedestal. By these vertical accents the whole composition from right to left is clearly and rhythmically articulated.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = from the right hand with the akṣamālā across Śiva's waist to the lower left hand holding the paraśu.

Madhya-bindu = at the point where the garland falling from the neck meets the left hand lying horizontally on the thigh.

d′-c = marks a horizontal level stretching from the elbow of the tripatāka hasta through the daṇḍa-hasta to the elbow of the corresponding second arm on the left side, also bent upwards.

These horizontal elements cover four vertical space-divisions from the end of the daṇḍa-hasta to the staff of the triśūla, and provide a strong inner balancing factor. The space-division below contains Śiva's chest and all his arms directed downwards.

E′-C = passes through the wrists of three hands, the one with the ḍamaru on the right side, the one bent towards the head and the other raised towards the paraśu on the left side. It cuts across the head on the level of the right earring.

This space-division contains all Śiva's arms directed upwards. The two arms reversed towards the head together with the daṇḍahasta form a broadbased triangle culminating in the head, which gives a balancing centre to the image. The two forearms stretching out from there on both sides almost horizontally extend this central balance by the symmetry of their positions.

e′-b = connects the wrists of the three uppermost hands and runs across Śiva's mukuṭa.
F′-B = marks the upper limit of the two hands holding the snake and of the jaṭā-mukuṭa.

Below the centre:

c′-d = marks the lower reach of Śiva's right hands, the level of his left knee and of the drummer's eyes. The interspace above holds both Śiva's thighs and his lowest hands.
C′-E = from the forehead of the bull to the shoulders of Gaṇeśa, the upper face of the drum and the thigh of the drummer.

This line, although not continuous, gives a definite horizontal demarcation, which serves as visual support to the sway of Śiva's figure. Below this line there is a closed array of four square vertical forms, which together constitute a stable quiet base to the composition, as against the restless movement of the upper parts.

b′-e = marks Śiva's right ankle and Gaṇesa's left elbow.
B′-F = marks the upper limit of the pedestal.

Distinct horizontal levels are thus given at the lines of the pedestal, of the drum and Gaṇeśa, at the daṇḍa-hasta across the body and at the line of the snake above Śiva's head. Although less prominent than the vertical demarcations, they also help in balancing and holding together the centrifugal sway of the entire figure.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXb

The pattern of movement in this composition is rather complex, because all diameters, even the subsidiary ones, are in one way or other involved in its texture; of course not all in equal measure.

Essential diameters: B′-B and d′-d.

B′-B = from the right upper edge of the pedestal, along Śiva's left flank and raised arm to the point of the triśūla.

a′-b = from the centre of the pedestal up along Śiva's left shin, his left forearm bent towards the knee, and the forearm raised towards the paraśu, in an almost uninterrupted sequence.

b′-a = from the muzzle of Nandī as axis through Śiva's right thigh and flank up to his left ear and the tail-end of the snake.

C′-A = up along Śiva's right hanging arm, through his daṇḍa- and tripatāka-hasta to the top of his jaṭā.

The entire upward thrust of Śiva's body and of his inner arms is directed within these four lines, and all the determining and essential features of the image lie concentrated here. Outside these lines the arm-movements on either side take a different course and spread either transversally or radially. Only the forearm of the tripatāka-hasta, which is reversed, lies approximately on this upward slant.

c′-f′ and D′-F′ = the outer parallels on the right side run across all the outstretched arms.

On the left side of the panel the upward slant of the main form-elements is not conform with that of Śiva's body along the diameter B′-B, but is in conformity with the diameter a′-a, whose slant is less by 15 degrees.

a′-a = up through both heels of Śiva, the wrist of his hand on the thigh, along the left side of his halo to the left hand holding the snake. It has no particular function. These devolve only on the outer parallels.

f-b = through Gaṇeśa's body along its backward slant, and up along the front of the paraśu, where it converges with the line a′-b.

F-C = along the outline of the drum and the drum-player and up along the back of the paraśu, which lies exactly in the middle between these two parallels.

Besides the paraśu, also all other form-elements in this part of the panel are governed by this space-direction: the head of the drum-player and his raised left leg, the upper part of the drum and the entire figure of Gaṇeśa.

It is quite unusual to find the most essential space-direction of a composition not sustained across the entire panel, but substituted in one part by a less forceful slant. It creates the impression that the central, most powerful movement is slowing down and subsiding towards the left side of the panel. This has, in a certain sense, also a stabilizing function, as will be shown later. It should be noted that the position of Śiva's head along the diameter f-f′ is complementary to this last mentioned slant and not to the overall slant of his body along B′-B.

F′-F = the complementary diameter has no particular function. These devolve on the parallels.

f′-e = gives the direction of the left upper arm whose forearm is bent on the thigh and of the arm holding the triśūla. It also marks the direction of the drum-player's right arm.

A-E = descends from the upper edge of the halo and forms the axis of the forearm bent towards the head. Between this line and

a-d = lies the forearm holding the snake in the same direction.

E′-A′ = to the right of the centre, from the hand holding the ring, along the patāka-hasta and along Śiva's right calf and left foot to the lower edge of the pedestal. The shank lies between this and the next outer parallel.

d′-a′ = descends along the tips of the two lowest hands to the exact centre of the pedestal's front.

The counter movement of the right shank is vital and essential, because the entire heavy sway of Śiva's body from right to left is hinged on it. Both the legs of Śiva converge towards the point a′ in the centre of the pedestal, and the inverted triangle, opening from that point towards d' and b encloses the entire upward expansion of Śiva's body.

The transversal movement of the arms is directed by several diameters, chiefly by the complementaries d′-d and c′-c. The main lines of stress of the arms appear to be running parallel to d′-d, at right angles to the inclination of the body. But if the height of the hands, which fan out on both sides, be taken into account, the transversal movement appears horizontal.

d′-d = crosses Śiva's body right along his waistbelt, and at the further end runs transversally across the drummer's headdress.

E′-D = across Śiva's chest in the axis of the right arm with the ḍamaru and left upper arm, whose forearm is bent down towards the knee. In the exact middle between this and the previous line, one arm extended on either side lies in their direction, on the right side the hand with the ring and on the left side the lower hand holding the paraśu.

e′-c = runs at some distance above the shoulders, and marks their direction as also that of the left upper arm, whose forearm is bent towards the ear.

F′-C = marks a descent of levels in accordance with the tilt of the body, from the right hand wielding the snake to the blade of the paraśu and the hand raised in front of it.

f′-b = marks a similar descent from the top of the halo to the left hand with the snake and the point of the triśūla. The paraśu stands at right angles to this space-direction.

Below the centre:

D′-E = from the hand with the akṣamālā, across the wrist of the hanging hand, along the lower line of Śiva's raised thigh and the upper rim of Gaṇeśa's halo, to the upper line of the drummer's knee.

The left thigh of Śiva, thrown out parallel to the thrust of the arms, supports them all by its weighty bulk, and forcefully underlines their movement. The drummer's left leg repeats the movement of Śiva's left leg and is contained between the same oblique chords as Śiva's shank.

The smaller figures of Gaṇeśa and the drummer, which at first sight look as if they were placed at random and had little connection with the figure of Śiva, show on closer analysis that their presence and position are by no means accidental, but provide an anchorage and a counterweight to many of the multifarious movements and space-directions projected by the main figure.

Complementaries: c-c′ and parallels.

c′-c = from the lowest right hand up along the left forearm lying on the thigh and the upper forearm holding the paraśu.
D′-C = along the forearm of the patāka hasta and the whole daṇḍa-hasta to Śiva's left armpit and finally to the blade of the paraśu.

The slant of the daṇḍa-hasta is thus complementary to that of the shoulder-line and stands to it at an angle of 30 degrees.

d′-b = from the tip of the patāka hasta through the line of Śiva's mouth to the neck of the triśūla touching both hands reversed towards the head.
E′-B = from the right hand with the ḍamaru to the left hand raised with the snake, passing above the massive lower rim of Śiva's headdress.
e′-a = from the wrist of the upper daṇḍa-hasta and the right hand holding the snake, through the body of the snake and the top of Śiva's jaṭāmukuṭa.
C′-D = from the horn of Nandī through both knees of Śiva, it marks the lowest reach of the group of arms on the left side.
b′-d = from Nandī's muzzle across the ring on Śiva's right shank, his left ankle, the head of Gaṇeśa to the shoulder of the drummer.
B′-E = along the sole of Śiva's right foot to the chest of Gaṇeśa and the waistline of the drummer.

These diameters do not exhaust all space-directions used in the texture of this composition. In the upper half, in the half-circle above the diameter d′-d there is a movement radiating from the centre, which uses some of the intermediate radii. From right to left the sectors of this half-circle contain: (Plate XXa)

between d′ and e′ = Śiva's two outstretched hands, with ring and ḍamaru.
between e′ and F′ = the upper daṇḍa-hasta and the hand with the snake.
between F′ and a = Śiva's head and halo.
between a and b = the left arm with the snake.
between b and c = the hand in front of the paraśu and the paraśu-blade, and the upper hand holding the paraśu.
between c and E = the lower hand holding the paraśu and the hand holding the triśūla

Below this line there is no radiating movement. The three figures of Nandī, Gaṇeśa and the drum-player form together a flat hollow curve, which holds, as in an open cup, the circle formed by Śiva's radiating arms.

As the figure of Nāṭarāja in Elūrā, Cave XIV, this dancing Śiva is also inscribed in two intersecting triangles, but with a difference. While in Elūrā the hexagram formed by the two equilateral triangles is a regular one, here only the upper triangle has its vertex on the centre-point A and its base on the horizontal C′-E. It circumscribes the broadening out of Śiva's figure from the top downwards along the line of his inner, reversed arms. The lower inverted triangle is displaced by one space-division to the right of the centre. It has its vertex at point a' and its base on the horizontal d′-c, out to the elbow of the reversed arm. The inner parallelogram formed by these two intersecting triangles is therefore irregular and stretched up towards the left side. Besides A and a' its lateral corners are, on the right side, at the hand hanging down towards Nandī, and on the left, at the elbow of the arm reversed towards the head.

This displacement of the two triangles with respect to one another creates that overbearing stress towards the left side which characterizes the whole figure. This stress most probably called for the necessity of spreading out the figures of Gaṇeśa and the drummer towards the left side, in order to collect and round up the outflowing movements. It may also have called for the necessity of straightening out the oblique space-direction, towards the left end, in resistence to the vehemence of the inner movement. And finally, to give the total movement directed towards the left sufficient space to contain its impact, the bulge at the lower end had to be added. If for the sake of experiment we cut off this bulge, Śiva's movement appears somewhat constrained and he looks, not as if he were dancing in a free space, but as if he were leaning out to the left side in order to draw away from the wall on the right, which is obstructing his movements.

In this composition one can clearly see how the figure is not composed into a frame, but is growing from inside, creating its own frame.

Integration and Interpretation

Naṭarāja is here again in the kuṭṭitam pose, as in the image of Elūrā, Cave XIV, except that the sides are reversed, and the number of arms is far greater. The movement of the body also has a different character. The upward thrust is more dynamic, as it does not evolve in a curve, but pushes in a straight line from the right knee up to the left shoulder and to the elbow of the left upper arm from where the forearm is deflected towards the head. The whole weight and bulk of Śiva's body is violently thrown to the left side. The movement then radiates into the outspread arms of which four on the left side are reversed towards the body, and four are fanning outwards. The whole mass of arms is held together by two heavy weapons in Śiva's hands, the triśula and the paraśu. The greater weight on the left side is balanced and re-adjusted by the right arms spread in the opposite direction. The daṇḍa-hasta, thrown across the body from the left shoulder joins the movement of all other arms on the right side. These arms, with exception of the tripatāka hasta, are spread out fanwise, in straight lines without any bend. They are all more or less alike, and have no separate individual movements, as is the case with the arms on the left side. While their mass is evidently balancing the mass of arms on the left side, they also look as if they were moving upwards. Or rather, as if they were all one single arm, moving from the lowest to the uppermost position through successive stages. This suggests a circular rotating movement, which involves the entire figure of Śiva, not only his forearms from the elbows, as is the case in the Elūrā Naṭarāja. The arms here appear like spokes of a gigantic wheel, of which Śiva's torso is the nave. Or the nave may also be seen in the oblique parallelogram around the madhya-bindu, (marked by a broader line) where Śiva's torso, his two lower left arms, the left thigh and the yajñopavīta seem to form the activating nucleus of the rotating movement, the innermost wheel. The movement of the wheel seems to have an active upward trend in the rigidly stretched arms on the right side, and a rather relaxed and passive one on the left side, where the arms are either bent or curved and are drawn downwards by the weight of their weapons. The circular movement rises from Śiva's right leg standing firmly on the lotus-pedestal, and is gradually led upwards through all the hands on the right side, the first two hanging down and the three next bent upwards at the wrists. From there it continues across the raised daṇḍa-hasta to the hand lifting the snake. The horizontal line of the snake transmits it to the other side, where it is received by the two hands bent towards the head. They in turn lead the movement down to the lower arms curved towards the thigh, where through the shin and left foot it returns to its point of departure on the pedestal. The four outer arms on the left side, although their hands are bent upwards, bring the movement down in a soft curve.

The direction of their movement is indicated by the slant of the paraśu. Both triśūla and paraśu converge towards Gaṇeśa and the drum, which visually support their weight.

In the centre of this complete circular revolution, where the ascending phase appears to be on the right side and the descending phase on the left, Śiva's head remains in equipoise and unaffected by the movement. It maintains a centre of stability and controls the circular sweep of the arms, counteracting the clockwise rotation by a slight tilt to the right.

Through the two vertical lines of the garland falling from Śiva's neck and the drapery between his legs, the central axis is carried downwards. Placed from each other at a distance of approximately the width of the head, these two lines extend the vertical of the head right through the length of Śiva's body and anchor it in the pedestal through the left foot standing on its point on the central axis of the face.

Another eminently stabilising factor is the long vertical staff of the triśūla. It breaks the outgoing movement of the first four left arms at the elbows, and throws it back towards the body. It collects the movements of the four outer arms, and with the concurrence of the staff of the paraśu, connects Śiva with the smaller figures below. Further stabilising factors are the vertical forms of the drummer and the drums, of Gaṇeśa and Nandī, which, together with the pedestal fill the entire base of the panel with solid supports. The radiating circular expanse of arms on both sides also contributes to balance and neutralise the one-sided slant. Forming a kind of halo around Śiva's body, it draws its excentric sway into the symmetrical curve of its arch.

But above all it is the head, unmoved and impassive in the central line of gravity, that dominates the whole display of Śiva's Cosmic Dance. Although Śiva's arms are converging towards his chest rather than towards his head, this part of his body is not given any prominence. It is entirely covered and overshadowed by the arm thrown across it, while all emphasis is laid on the head, which is sharply chiselled and has the strongest relief and plastic expression. The psychic centre of this figure apparently does not lie in the Prāṇa-cakra, the vital centre, but in the head, the seat of supreme Consciousness.

If we consider the Dance of Śiva as representing the revolution of the Cosmic Wheel, the two different phases of the movement, the active upward drive on one side and the passive downward trend on the other, acquire their own particular significance. They reveal and become the graphic representation of the two alternate phases of the cosmic Cycle: its emanation and evolution in Space and Time, and its dissolution and reabsorption into the one unchanging Essence of all things. With respect to Śiva, they represent the two aspects of his divine Līlā, the forthgoing activity by which he veils himself in the Māyā of Creation, and the withdrawing activity, by which he releases all created forms from the whirl of Saṁsāra and reintegrates them into his own Being [1]. With respect to the Jīvātman, one phase is the evolution in matter and form, the entanglement in worldly existence, the pravṛtti mārga, and the other the involution, the release from the bondage of manifestation, the nivṛtti mārga, leading back to unity with the Supreme.

Although this symbolism of Śiva's dance is known and accepted in its generic sense, it is more difficult to establish which side and which emblems of any Naṭarāja image stand for the one or the other aspect. Obviously it is not the same in all Naṭarāja images. In the present image the emblem of the three Guṇas, the triśūla and the emblem of Śiva's creative power, the paraśu, are both on his left side. It may therefore be that this, the descending side, is here representing pravṛtti mārga, the going forth into manifested existence, weighed downwards by tāmasic heaviness. On the other side Śiva holds the akṣamālā, the emblem of the thirty-six tattvas associated with his Jñāna-aspect, and the head of the snake, the symbol of the inviolability of his Law. As this side is ascending from the Earth-plane towards Śiva's head, which is here in the serene aspect of Supreme Consciousness, it may be that it represents nivṛtti mārga, the path of ascent and reabsorption into the eternal Principle of Light.

On the other hand it may be argued that, since the triśūla is held as a very prominent feature in perfect verticality, it is here symbolizing the axis of the Universe, which is another of its accepted meanings, that the axe (paraśu) signifies the cutting of worldly bondages and that the folded arms are reversing the flow of life towards the head and heart of Śiva, who is reabsorbing them into himself. In this case it is the left side that would represent Anugraha or the nivṛtti mārga and the right side would represent Tirobhāva or pravṛtti mārga. The akṣamālā would have to be taken as signifying the emergence of the thirty-six tattvas at the beginning of Creation, when Nāda, inaudible first Sound, first Vibration, here represented by the ḍamaru, disturbs the undifferentiated equilibrium of the Unmanifest and sets into motion the process of Manifestation. The hands raised with the snake may then represent the maintainance of the Universe, the stage between Creation and Dissolution. It is also significant in this respect that Śiva wears the male ear-ring on his left side, which denotes his Puruṣa-aspect, and the female ear-ring on the right side, which shows him in his Śakti-Prakṛti-aspect.

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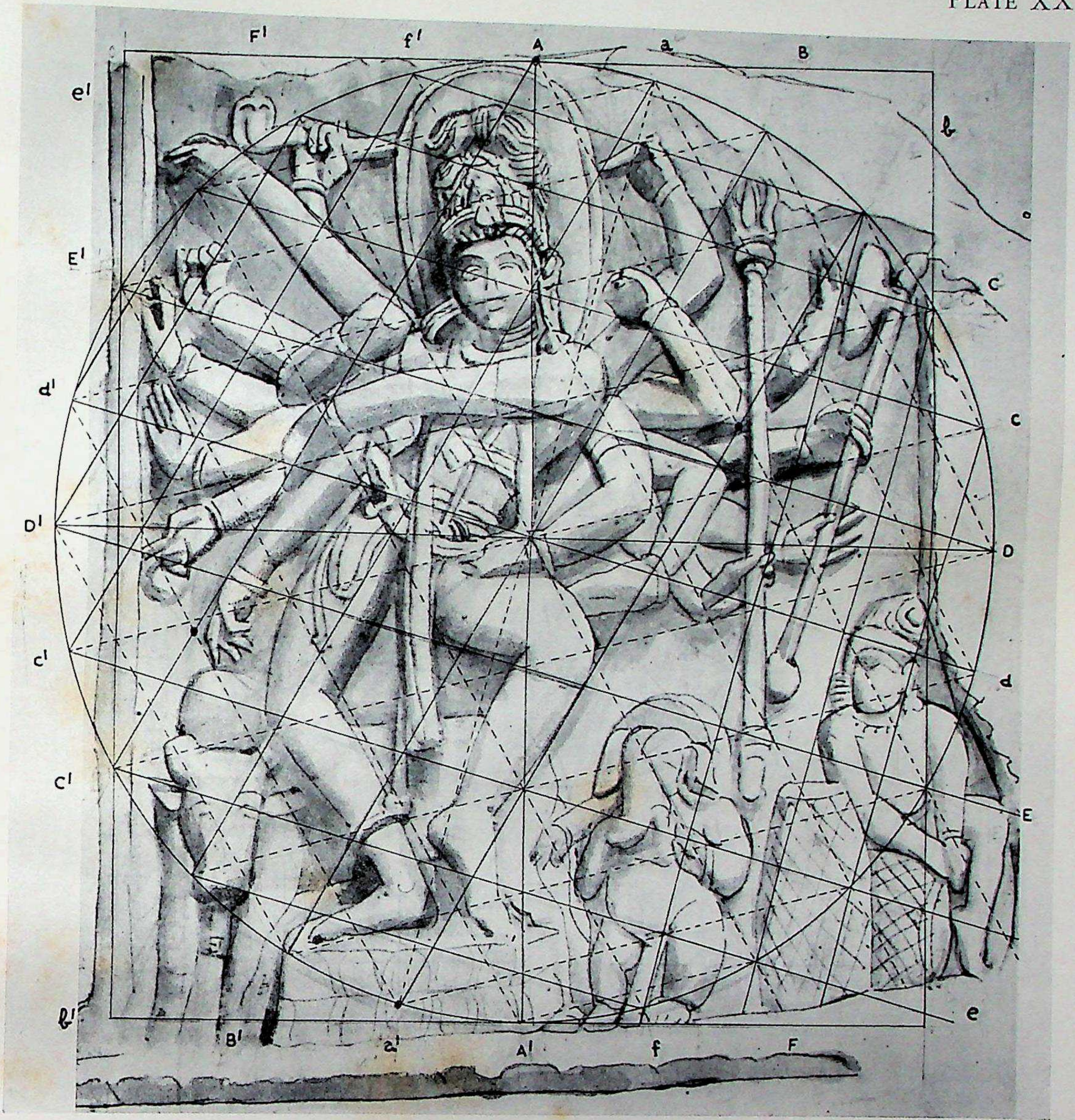
[1] These two phases are in the later South-Indian bronze-images of Naṭarāja designated as Tirobhāva and Anugraha respectively.

It is however not the aim of this book to enter into discussions on particular points of doctrine, but only to show, what different aspects an image like this can reveal to the contemplative mind. Symbols and symbolic representations are by their very nature ambivalent. They may stand for one thing and for its exact opposite, depending upon whether they are visualized from below or from above, that means from the physical or the metaphysical plane. These two planes being the mirror reflections of one another, the same entities appearing in them take contrary connotations.

Unless the exact school of thought that inspired a work of art is known, its meaning will always remain open to a variety of interpretations, depending on the personal conceptions of the beholder.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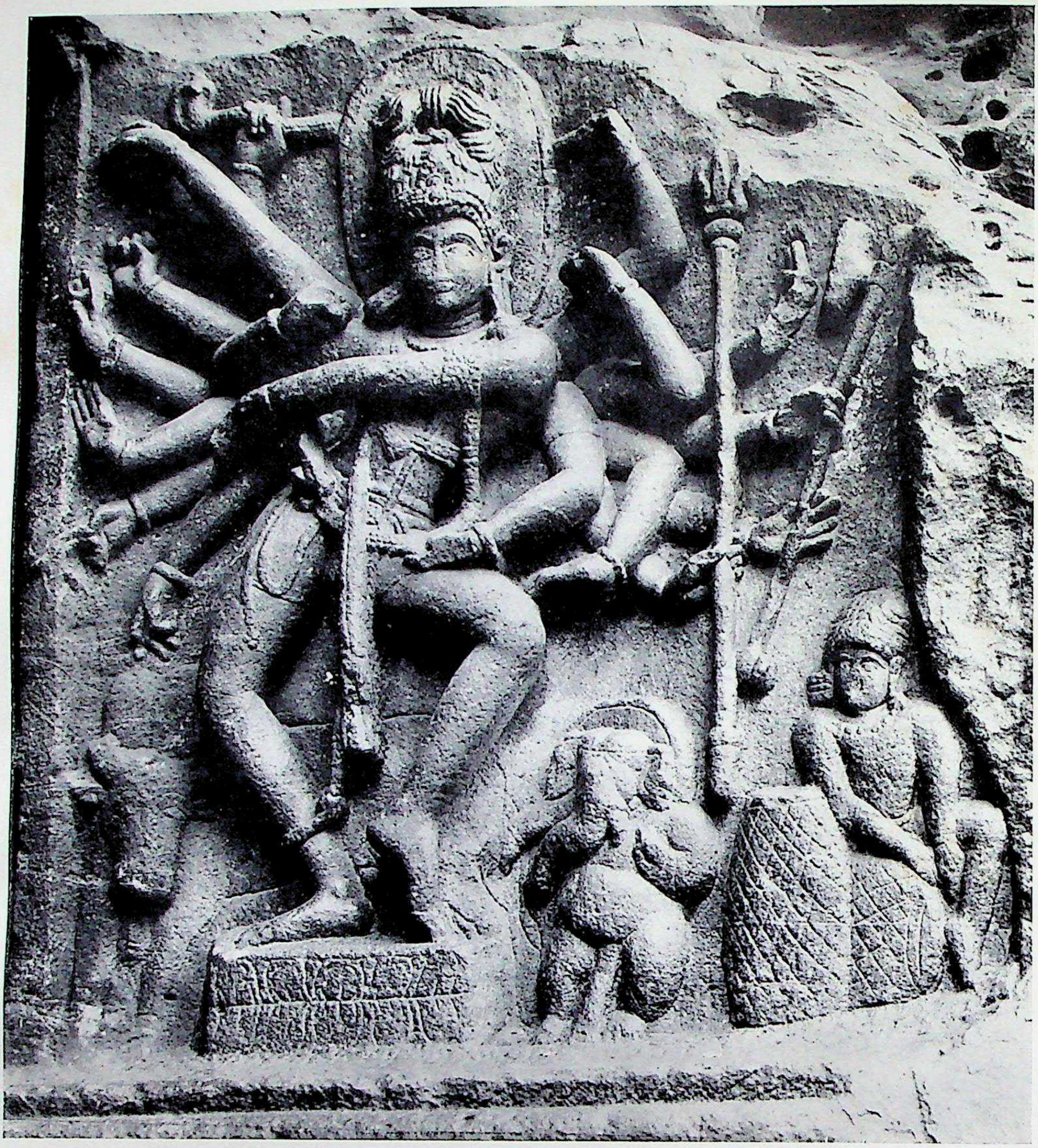
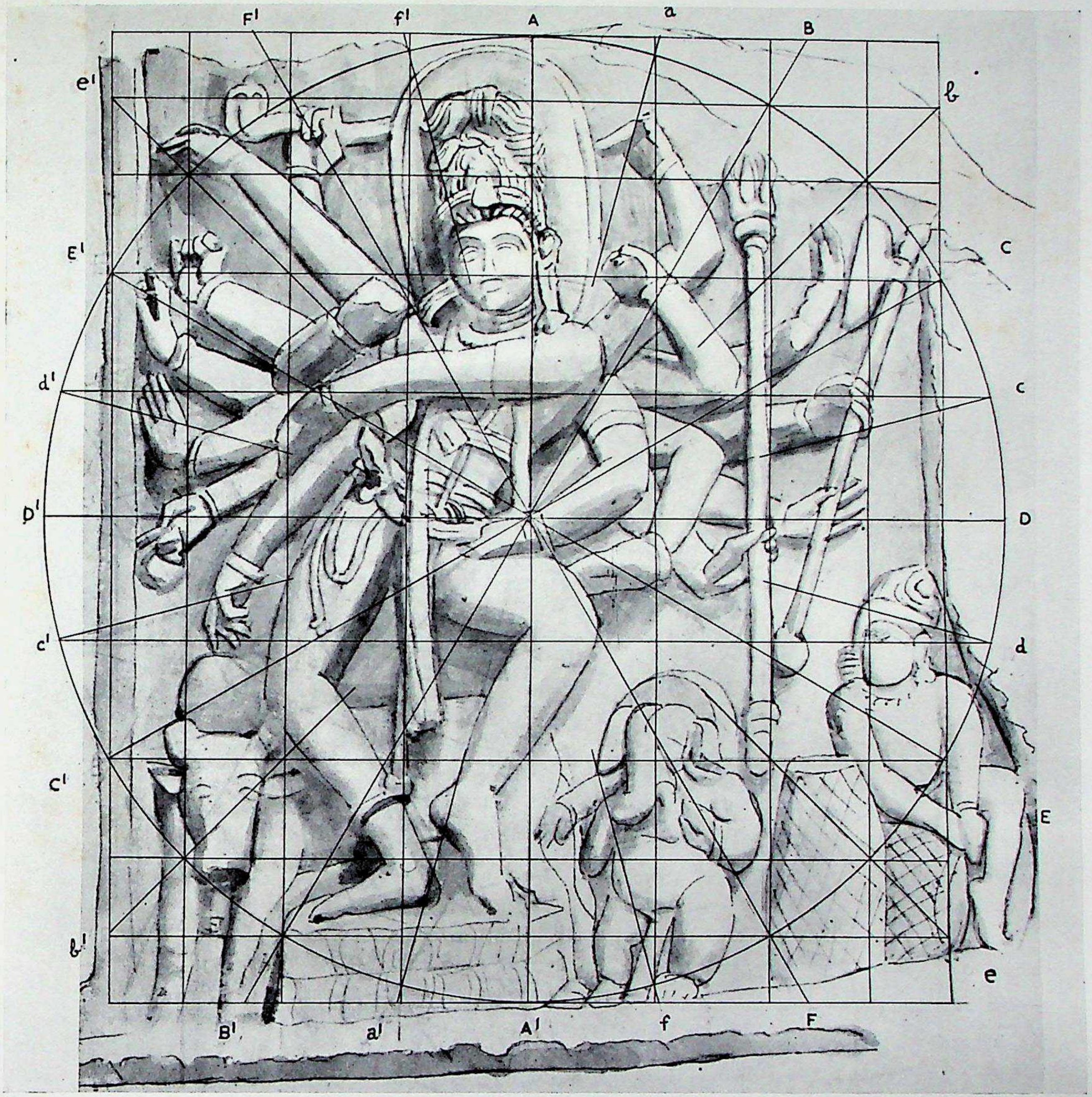
b. TIME DIVISION



ŚIVA NAṬARĀJA, BĀDĀMĪ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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE DANCE OF ŚIVA

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XXI

Śiva is dancing on a flat lotus-pedestal. His feet are in the kuṭṭitam pose, and like the Naṭarāja in Bādāmī, he is standing on his right foot and is beating the rhythm with his left heel. The first left arm is the daṇḍa-hasta, thrown straight across the body, a constant feature in Naṭarāja images. The second left arm is thrown upwards in the opposite direction, equally in the daṇḍa-hasta pose. The tripatāka-hasta on the right side, which is a usual correlate to the daṇḍa-hasta, is here developed into a vyākhyāna- or cin-mudrā, with the tips of thumb and index joined together. The other hands on the right side hold the ḍamaru and the triśūla, and the lowest, pointing forward, is a patāka-hasta. On the left side the third hand holds a crescent moon near the chest, and the last holds a snake, hanging head downwards.

A drummer with two drums is standing against the right wall, two flute-players are squatting against the left wall, while in the middle two karatāla-players are seated behind Śiva's legs. The tiny figure of Bhṛṅgī is visible between the legs of Śiva, imitating his dance. In the two upper corners below the brackets small couples of Gandharvas and Kinnaras are floating.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XXIa

The panel is essentially a square. But pilaster-brackets and bases with the addorsed musicians strongly impinge upon its corners. On the left side Śiva's uppermost hand and on the right the head of the triśūla are half hidden behind the brackets. The left hand is actually carved into the side of the bracket. The main figure is not placed on a flat surface, but on the background of a deep, semicircular recess, and therefore the legs are partly detached from the ground and carved in the round. This is causing some displacements in perspective according to the angle of vision, and the geometrical texture cannot be as neat as in a flat relief.

The enclosing circle is inscribed in the square of the panel and is divided by twelve diameters, with a certain emphasis on the intermediate diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = plumb-line through Śiva's body from the head down to the foremost foot, but not marked by any prominent line or form-element. Bhṛṅgi's back and Śiva's left foot are the only vertical forms lying on the madhya-sūtra. The balance of Śiva's excentric movement is hinged on this precarious support.

The madhya-sūtra divides Śiva's body in two parts, asymmetrical in shape, but about equal in bulk and weight. Śiva's body describes a zig-zag line around the madhya-sūtra: from the foot at the centre it runs forward to the left knee, from there back to the right hip, then forward again to the left shoulder and back to the top of the headdress.

f′-a′ and a-f = on both sides of the madhya-sūtra enclose the central vertical interspace with the central parts of Śiva's body, from his head to his feet, less the projecting shoulder on the left and the projecting knee on the right side. Bhṛṅgī and the second karatāla-player are included in this space.

F′-B′ = along the arm raised with the ḍamaru, through the wrists of the two lower hands to the base of the drum. The interspace between f′-a′ and this line contains Śiva's three outer arms, his right knee and the outer part of his lotus pedestal. The cross of three elbows lies at the centre of this space.

e′-b′ = along the outline of the triśūla and the drummer. The interspace between this line and F′-B′ contains a vertical array of forms, from the two drums across the hands of Śiva to the staff of the triśūla.

C′-E′ = axis through the drum-player's body. The two outer interspaces contain his entire figure.

B-F = from the raised left arm through the elbows of the lower arms down along the first karatāla-player's head and body. The interspace contains the cross of arms at Śiva's left shoulder with his upper arms projected at right angles, the hand with the crescent moon and the entire vertical extension of the karatāla player's figure.

b-e = from the inner face of the bracket through Śiva's hand holding the snake, along the second flute-player's arm and the first flute-player's leg. The interspace contains Śiva's highest and lowest forearm, the head of the snake and the legs of the flute players.

The line b-e, together with its counterpart e′-b′ sets off the central part of the panel allotted to Śiva from the brackets and the lateral groups. These groups are pressed against the side-walls within the last two interspaces and stand at almost right angles to Śiva. They form the outer rim of the rounded hollow that contains his movement.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = crosses Śiva's body at the waistline and runs through his lowest right hands to the head of the drummer, on the left side through the empty space between his forearms and the heads of the karatāla-players and the snake. There is no line definitely marking the horizontal. The composition scorns all essential stabilising factors and relies on balance of movement alone.

Madhya-bindu = slightly aside of the centre of Śiva's body, at the most indrawn part of his waist near the navel.

d′-c = runs from Śiva's right elbows to his left bent elbow. It marks the axis of the two inward bent forearms and the upper level of his two hands holding the triśūla and the snake. The expanded thorax and the lowest forearms are all in the space-division between this line and the madhya-prastha.
E′-C = marks the level of Śiva's right shoulder and the dividing line between his face and his neck and between the roots of the two upper left arms. The interspace contains Śiva's chest and four upper arms, including the hand in vyākhyāna-mudrā, the crescent moon, the forearm holding the ḍamaru, the staff of the triśūla and the legs of the Gandharvas.
e′-b = marks the lower face of the brackets, and passing from the top of the hand with the ḍamaru to the head of the Gandharvas it shows the upper limit of Śiva's head. This interspace contains Śiva's face, in the oblique, his hand with the ḍamaru, his left upper arm, and heads and torsos of the Gandharvas. Only Śiva's mukuṭa and raised left arm reach into the divisions between the brackets.
c′-d = below the centre, marks the lower end of the drapery between Śiva's legs and of the loop of the hanging snake.
C′-E = from the upper rim of the drum to the shoulders of the flute-players.
b′-e = from base to base of the two side-pilasters across Śiva's ankles and those of the karatāla-player.
B′-F = marks the tip of Śiva's left foot on the lotus-pedestal, the foot of the drum-player and the legs extended on their seats of the flute-players. The last two interspaces contain all that is lying horizontally along the ground.

The central part of Śiva's body, which runs in a straight oblique from his right knee to his left shoulder is contained within four horizontal interspaces, two below and two above the madhya-prastha, his head is contained within the third upper interspace. The lateral extension of his arms reaches from bracket to bracket, trespassing only slightly into the outer space-divisions. The musicians fill only the lower half of the panel, and are divided from the upper part of the panel, not by a horizontal but by the line of the diameter d′-d, descending from right to left.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXIb

While the Space-division is fairly simple, the Time-division in this composition appears rather problematic. The main reason for this is that the same space-directions are not valid over the entire composition and are different in the outer parts from what they are in the centre. Or rather we may say, that the space directions which are valid for the general outlay of the composition are overlaid in the centre, in the figure of Śiva, by some other, closely allied, but more dynamic space directions. The only way to get at a sort of cogent compositional scheme is to base its lines on the general, over-all directions of the most important form-aggregates, and not on any prominent single feature, and then to see in what way single features deviate from it.

Essential diameters: a′-a, B′-B, C′-C.

a′-a = from the point of Śiva's right foot, as an axis through his torso to the root of his neck.
B′-A = from the base of the second drum, along Śiva's right thigh and flank, through his daṇḍa- and pravartita-hasta to his head.
A′-B = from Śiva's left foot, along his left shin and flank and along his raised upper arm. It forms the axis of the second karatāla-player.

These two outer parallel chords of a′-a hold all the most important and weighty features of Śiva's body, and the overall slant of his figure is encompassed between them. Further parallels have importance only on the left side of the panel:

f-b = forms the axis of the first karatāla-player's body from his feet to his head, and then runs across Śiva's arm with the snake and his outer elbow to the lower edge of the bracket.
F-C = along the shin of the second flute-player, the elbow of the karatāla-player, the snake's head and Śiva's outermost hand, then up along the thigh of the Gandharva.
e-c = up through the flute-player's' group, along the snake's tail to the feet of the Gandharvas.
E-D = is the axis of the first flute-player's body, (not marked in the diagram).

The parallels on the right side of the panel have no importance and can be left out. Here it is the complementary trend along the diameter f-f′ and its parallels that governs the movements.

f-f′ = up through the first karatāla-player's right shin, through Śiva's left thigh, through the slant of his hand in cin-mudrā and along the right outline of his mukuṭa.
A′-F′ = up through the slant of Śiva's left foot standing on its point, across his daṇḍa-hasta and right elbow to the hand with the ḍamaru along the slant of its forearm.

a′-e′ = from the point of Śiva's right foot across the wrist of his patāka-hasta up along the slant of the triśūla (although not quite exactly).

B′-E′ = marks the outline of the second drum and also the slant of the drum-player's front-line.

b′-d′ = from the foot of the drummer through his body to the back-line of his head.

The two complementary lines B′-E′ and F-C on either side cut out the lateral groups symmetrically in elongated isosceles triangles, while they leave a central space in the form of a trapezium standing on its narrow side for the development of Śiva's movements, which are expanding and broadening upwards. Thus they belong as much to the Space- as to the Time-division.

Within the general sway of Śiva's body along the diameter a′-a, the tilt from his right knee to his left shoulder and the arm extended upwards is much stronger and is actually set on the diameter B′-B.

B′-B = from the base of the drums up along the inner outline of Śiva's right thigh, through the extension of his left flank and shoulder and through the slant of his upper daṇḍa-hasta up to the elbow.

Overstressing the general scheme of lines governed by the diameter a′-a, it creates that dominant sway in the figure of Śiva, culminating in the thrust of the forearm with the hanging hand.

a′-b = its left parallel, joins the two extreme points of this upward movement, running from the instep of his right foot, along the calf of the left leg, in the direction of the body and upper arm to the edge of the bracket and the point of the hanging hand.

b′-a = its right parallel, follows Śiva's body in its extreme slant on the right side.

The transversal movement in this composition, which comes next in importance, is mainly embodied in Śiva's arms and is essentially directed by the diameter C′-C with its parallels. But, in the aggregate forms of the arms, single elements are also here deviating from the overall space-direction.

C′-C = from the wrists of the drum-player, along the slant of the faces of the drums, across Śiva's body and as axis through his forearm holding the crescent moon to the shoulder of the Apsaras on the left side.

c′-b = from the drum-player's shoulder, along the forearm of the patāka-hasta and as axis through the whole length of the daṇḍa-hasta, emerging from the angle between the two upper arms and ending on the edge of the bracket.

D′-B = from the drum-player's head all along the upper outline of Śiva's right arms, across his cin-mudrā hand and the line of his eyes to the upper corner of the bracket.

The transversal movement is in its essential features channelled between these three lines, the central line c′-b being the most important. As it runs through the daṇḍa-hasta it forms the main support of this entire array of arms. Within these three lines all forms run lengthwise across the middle of the panel, except at both ends, where they stand upright and close their thrust. There are further parallels above and below, but these only mark the displacement of levels from one form-element to the other in accordance with the general movement:

d′-a and E′-A = mark the ascent of levels from the shaft of the triśūla to the arm with the ḍamaru and to Śiva's mukuṭa, parallel to the slant of the arms.
b′-c = ascent from the lower rim of the first drum to the point of the first karatāla-player's mukuṭa, the hand with the snake and the feet of the Apsaras.
B′-D = ascent from the base of the drums along the upper rim of the lotus pedestal, through Śiva's right ankle to his left heel, the knee of the karatāla-player, his hand and his shoulder and the head of the snake.
a′-d = ascending from the front of the lotus pedestal, it goes to mark the upper outline of the flute-player's group.

This oblique movement meets the overall upward trend along a′-a at an angle of 45 degrees and the upward trend along B′-B at an angle of only 30 degrees. It is therefore not opposing these upward movements, but is concurring with them and enhancing their active power. But it is met at right angles by the complementary downward trend along F′-F and its parallels, which checks it and articulates it into several sections.

F′-F = from the inner limit of the ḍamaru along the outer contour of the cin-mudrā hand and along the slant of Śiva's left (broken) thigh. It ends at the flute-player's foot.
f′-e = marks the slant of Śiva's mukuṭa and face, touches the headdress of the second karatāla-player, the shoulder of the first and runs along the raised thigh of the first flute-player down to his left knee.
A-E = forms the axis of Śiva's left upper arm, which hangs down with the snake.
B-D = along the shanks of the Gandharvas.

On the right side of the panel only the parallel E′-A′ has importance as it determines the slant coming down from Śiva's hand holding the triśūla along his right shin down to the point of his left foot, and thus marks the outer limit of his figure.

All form-elements distributed over the panel along these lines counteract and balance the vehement thrust of Śiva's body. Chief among these are the lines of the left arms hanging downwards with the snake and with the crescent moon, Śiva's head and mukuṭa, the cin-mudrā hand, the left thigh, whose movement is extended into the raised shin of the karatāla-player, and finally the right shin of Śiva. They all contribute to assemble and to hold together the extremely one-sided stress of Śiva's upper body.

Integration and Interpretation

Quite unlike the well-balanced figure of the Naṭarāja in Cave XIV, this dancing Śiva, as already shown, appears to be almost swept off his feet by the unilateral thrust of his upper body. There is no doubt, however, that his balance looks more precarious now than it did originally. The loss of his left forward bent leg makes his body appear to be more or less hanging in the air, while in the composition, as it was originally, the left leg supported and balanced its top-heaviness. The thigh articulated the sway of the upper body, and the shin, by doubling the slant of the body, rounded up its movement.

The arms, which are flung out violently on both sides bring the dance to its culminating expression of rapture and ecstasy. Reaching from one end to the other in the central space of the panel, embracing the entire extent in one wide sweep, they at the same time act as a kind of balancing rod that stabilizes the excentric sway. The compact mass of arms on the right side is by its concerted parallelism counterpoising the longer, far-flung, but more dispersed arms on the left side. The straight arms on the right side are anchored in the figure of the drummer, and the big gap between the highest and the lowest arm on the left side is closed and held together by the group of Gandharvas. Thus the outgoing movements of the arms find a sort of conclusion and final rounding up in the outlying lateral groups.

The centre of gravity within the violent thrust of Śiva's body lies at the point where the two essential movements are hinged upon one another. This centre does not exactly coincide with the madhya-bindu of the composition, but lies somewhat higher, in Śiva's rounded and expanded thorax. Here his great energy is concentrated and collected, and from here it radiates. On this form, which is the nucleus of the whole composition, the highest light is focussed. It is Śiva's Prāṇa-cakra, the central reservoir of the Life-breath, from where emanate the stresses that create the dance of the Cosmos. It is said, that he who meditates on this cakra becomes, like Īśvara, able to create and to destroy the worlds.

In the form of this dance again the conception of rotation around a vital centre is implied, and this rotation involves, as in Bādāmī, the entire figure of Śiva.

Considering the whole movement as a wheel revolving around the hub of the Prāṇa-cakra, the line of Śiva's body from his right knee to his left extended arm divides the revolution of the wheel into two distinct phases. The bent legs and the arms with their attributes figure, like the arms of a svastika, the spokes and the felloe of the wheel and indicate the sense of its rotation. The movement rises from the right foot upon the lotus-pedestal and goes upwards along the right shin, the two lower right hands, the triśūla, the arm with the ḍamaru, all pointing upwards in a clockwise curve. This rising movement is carried through the head and mukuṭa to the other side where it reaches its culmination in the extended left hand. This hand, at the uppermost end of the diameter dividing the circle in two phases, marks the infinitesimal moment of balance and rest between the active upward drive and the passive downward trend. It is at the opposite end from the right knee, which marks the point of greatest stability and resistance. From this apex, the dynamic climax, the inevitable reversal into the downward trend, obeying gravitation, begins. It starts at the bend of the hand hanging from the outstretched arm and is carried down by the weight of the two left arms, by the snake hanging from Śiva's lower hand and through his left shin to the foot, where it comes to rest by the side of the other foot on the lotus-pedestal.

To complete the image of the wheel, there are the smaller figures that surround Śiva along two thirds of the directing circle, collecting the outflowing, centrifugal movements and referring them back to the centre of the Prāṇa-cakra, from where they emanated.

> "All things live in the Prāṇa, like spokes in a chariot-wheel." [1]
>
> "That supreme Ātman is the Lord of all elements, the king of all Beings. As all spokes are inserted in the hub and the felly of the chariot-(wheel), similarly all elements, all gods, all worlds, all individual, empirical selves live in that supreme Ātman." [2]

All representations of Siva's cosmic dance appear to sum up the totality of the cosmic process. Yet every image presents a different aspect and lays stress on different phases in the process of evolution and involution.

The dance of Śiva in Cave XIV represents essentially the primary, incipient stage of the dance, when the universe is first blossoming forth from the pulsation of His divine energy. Śiva is in his youthful aspect, filled with sustained energy, and the idea of death only mentioned as an aside, embodied in a different person. But here as in Bādāmī the whole cycle of manifestation, from its inception to its return into the Primal Cause, is incorporated in the person of Śiva alone. His dance revolves through all three phases of His Līlā, Creation (Sṛṣṭi), Maintainance (Sthiti) and Dissolution (Saṁhāra) in an unending, uninterrupted and ever renewed dynamic sequence, which works through alternating phases generated reciprocally from one another. Not only is the form of the wheel suggestive of a full cycle, but the symbolism of the daṇḍa-hasta would also confirm this meaning. The daṇḍa-hasta signifies Creation when it is held on the height of the hip, Maintainance when it is held on the height of the shoulders, and Dissolution when thrown upwards. Here we have the daṇḍa-hasta in its two extreme positions, the lowest and the highest, which consequently would involve the full display of all possibilities of manifestation and dissolution.

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[1] Praśna Upaniṣad, II. 6.

[2] Bṛhadarāṇyaka Upaniṣad, II. 5.15.

The head of Śiva is not, as in the Naṭarāja of Cave XIV and in Bādāmī, held erect, as the Controller and the Lord of the Dance, but it is thrown on one side, and is involved in the dance as much as all the limbs of his body. Although the expression of the face is detached and serene, it is not abiding above the flux and pulsation of Life, as the centre of Consciousness. The centre here is in the Prāṇa-cakra of Śiva, which is identical with the Prāṇa-vāyu, the Cosmic Breath that pervades the whole universe. The whole figure is filled with its active, outflowing pulsation, the moving Energy. Śakti Tattva is fully incorporated in this figure of Śiva, and represents its essential aspect. This is perhaps the reason why Śakti, as a separate figure is absent from this image.

> "Prāṇa-vāyu is the self-begotten, but unlimited manifestation of eternal Life." [1]
>
> "Prāṇa is thus Śakti as the universal, pervading source of Life, organising itself as matter into what we call living forms." [2]

In the Prāṇa-cakra of Śiva, in the centre of the revolving dance is the abode of the ingoing and outgoing breath, of the 'Ham' and the 'Sa', which pervade and uphold the universe. They correspond to the two phases of rotation, the active and the passive described above.

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[1] Sir John Woodroffe, Shakti and Shākta, p. 319.

[2] Ibid. p. 317.

> "The supreme Haṁsa is the Cosmic Breath: Haṁ is the outgoing Breath which symbolizes Creation, and Sa the ingoing Breath, which in a cosmic sense is dissolution."[1]
>
> "When this Paramahaṁsa is spread (vyāpta), that is, displayed, then all forms of matter (bhūta), *viz*. Ākāśa, Pavana and the rest spring up in their order. Of these five the root is Citta. This Haṁsa disports itself in the World-lotus sprung from the mud of delusion (mohapaṅka) in the lake of ignorance (avidyā). When this Haṁsa becomes unworldly (niṣprapañca) and in dissolving form (saṁhāra-rupī), then it makes visible the Ātman or Self."[2]

This Haṁsa disporting himself within the World-lotus is here the figure of Śiva dancing upon the lotus-pedestal. He is entirely given to the ecstatic rapture of the Dance, his entire Being is Śakti-rūpa, it is identified with the active, never resting power that moves the Universe. It represents both the veiling of Consciousness in the act of Manifestation, and the unveiling of Cit (supreme Consciousness) in the release from worldly bondage. Its mood (bhāva) is unqualified, perfect Bliss. It is the profound Bliss experienced in fulfilling all potentialities of his Being in the eternal Change, which is another aspect of the eternal Persistence.

The plastic treatment itself is of an altogether different kind than in the Naṭarāja of Cave XIV, which fact must be noted with reference to its possible implications. The forms here are not inscribed as outlines and carved with a moderate relief into the background of the panel. They do not remain embedded in the rock as surface modulations, with an undulating background supporting them. They are brought out in the round, and the figure of Śiva is essentially three-dimensional like a freestanding sculpture. It is in part even detached from the ground and set into a hollow space of indefinite shade, from which his forms emerge and on which they move as independent entities.

This detachment of the forms from their rocky substratum may in fact be another feature, which, perhaps quite unintentionally, expresses the full and complete expansion of a cycle of manifestation, when it has matured all its fruit and exhausted all its potentialities, and when, at the extreme end of its involvement in matter, that duality arises, which makes it appear as autonomous and independent of its ultimate Cause and Ground of Existence.

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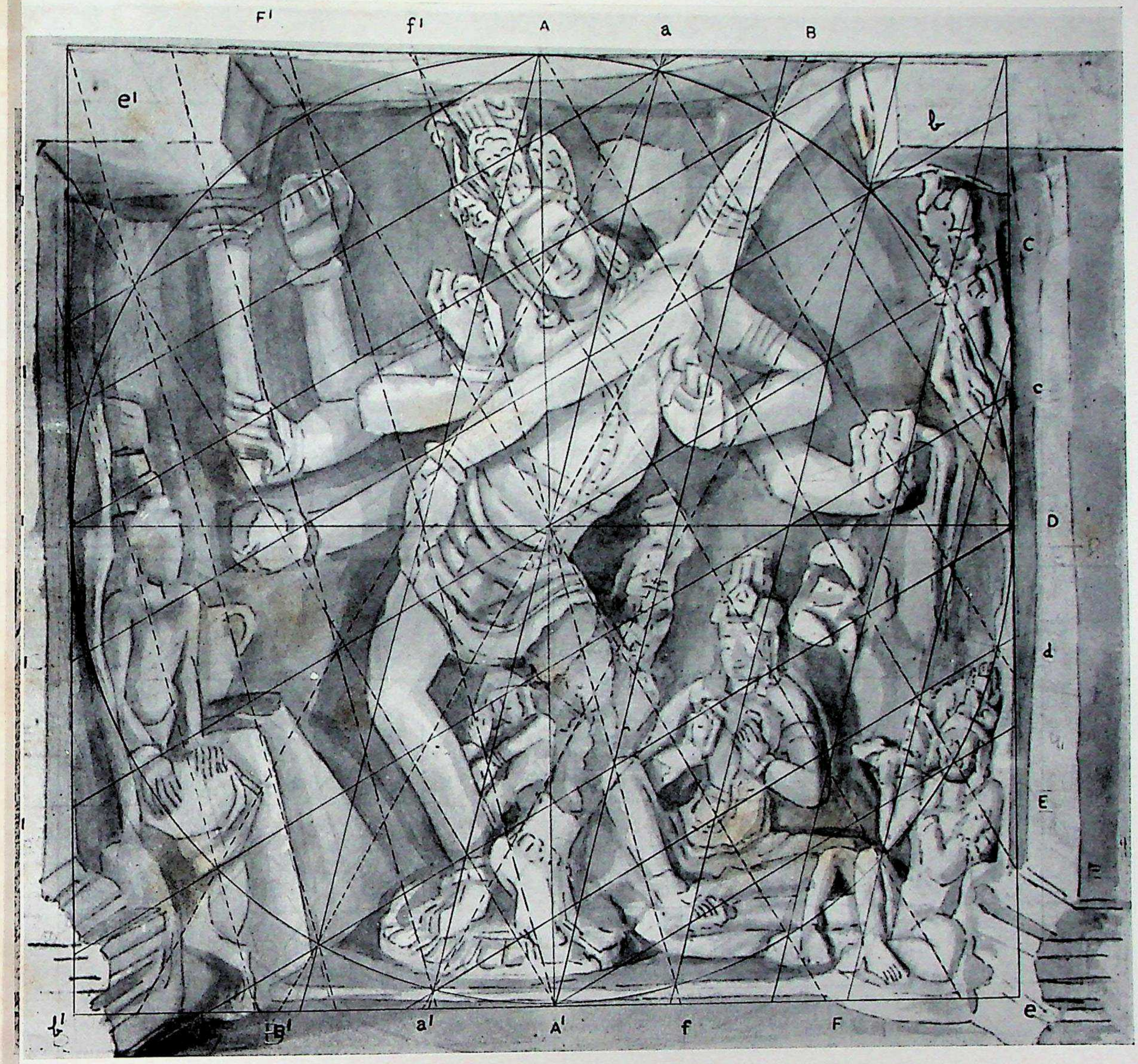
[1] Ānandalaharī, I, commentary, transl. by Arthur Avalon.
[2] Sir John Woodroffe, Garland of letters, p. 157.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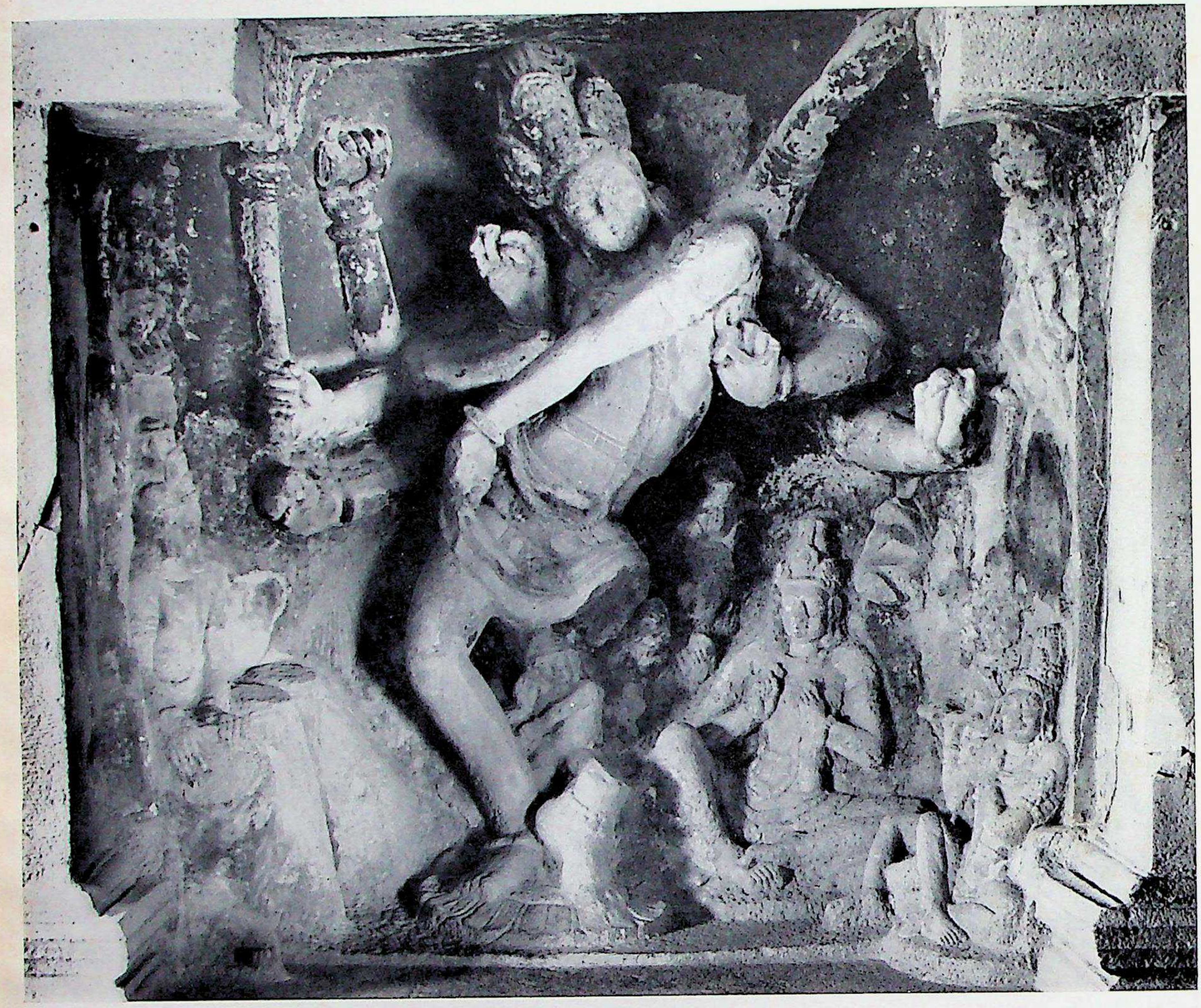
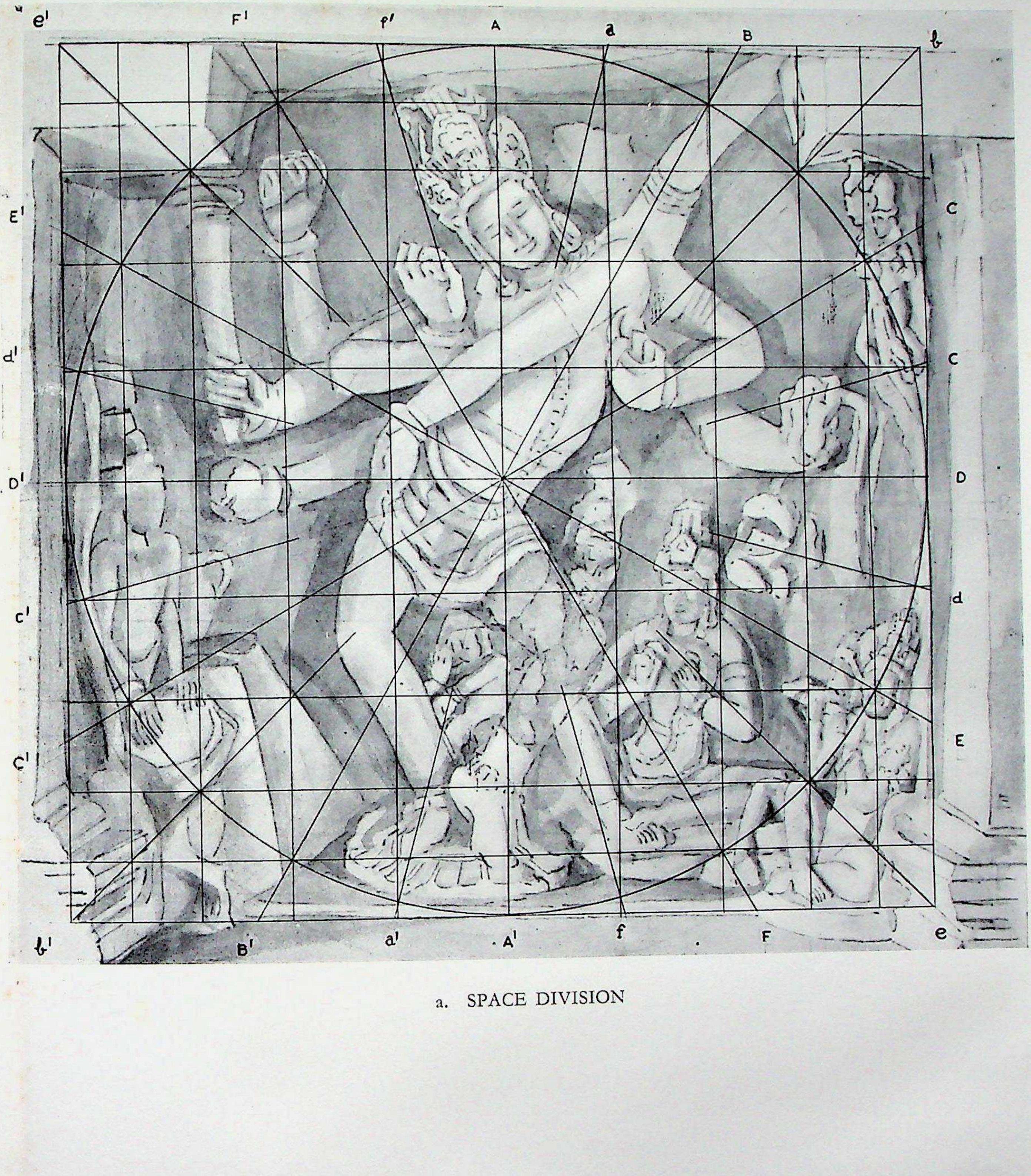
b. TIME DIVISION



THE DANCE OF ŚIVA, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JÑĀNA-DAKṢIṆĀMŪRTI

ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE, 8TH-9TH A.D.

PLATE XXII

On a lotus-seat borne by a broad lion-throne, Dakṣiṇāmūrti-Śiva is seated in siddhāsana, in the rigid posture of a meditating Yogin. His head is crowned by an elaborately decorated jaṭā-mukuṭa and is overshadowed, as by an umbrella, by the divine Aśvattha Tree. He has eight arms, of which the first right one, although broken, can be assumed to have been in vyākhyāna mudrā, the gesture of teaching. The second is touching the knee. The hand is knocked off, but might have held, according to iconographic rules, an amṛta-ghaṭaka or a kamaṇḍalu. The third is holding an akṣamālā and the fourth a serpent. On the left side the first arm is resting on the left shin in varada mudrā, the gesture of bestowing boons. The second hand is broken off, but might have held a book representing the Vedas. The third hand is reaching out to support the two Ṛṣis seated by his side, and the fourth is holding a nīlotpala flower (the blue night-lotus). Dakṣiṇāmūrti's throne is guarded by three lions, and four Yakṣas with musical instruments are squatting on both sides. Five Ṛṣis, three on the right and two on the left side, are seated in meditation. Above them the eight Lokapālas on their vāhanas are rushing forward acclaiming the Universal Teacher.

This image shows an interesting departure from iconographical descriptions and current representations, in so far as Śiva has eight, instead of four arms, and is surrounded, not by Kinnaras and Gandharvas, but by the eight Lokapālas. Another unusual feature is that the divine Aśvattha Tree, under which Śiva is seated, does not look like a normal tree, not even like the decorative transcription of a tree. The long snake-like undulating forms with loops, rings and knots that make up its crown look more like roots than like branches. On one side only some pīpal-leaves are discernible, and between the loops there are mango-fruit, lotus-buds, flowers, and other not clearly definable shapes. In this curious multiform, composite growth one is almost inclined to suspect the artist's intention of literally translating the Upaniṣadic symbolism which says:

> "The threefold Brahman has his roots above: his branches are space, air, fire, water, earth and the other elements. This is called the Single Fig-tree: and therein inheres the Fiery-Energy (tejas) that is the Supernal Sun, and it is likewise of the OṀ, who is the One Enlightener".
>
> Maitri Up. VI. 4.[1]

> "It (the world) is like an eternal holy fig-tree, whose root is above and whose branches go downwards.... This (root) is called even pure, this is called Brahman, this is called even immortal, upon this all the worlds are founded: none becomes different from it. This is That".
>
> Kaṭha Up. VI. I.[2]

Space-Division or Measure

Plate XXIIa

The panel is a perfect square, and the directing circle, inscribed in the square, is divided by twelve diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = Through the exact centre of the Tree, of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's figure and the of throne. Since the composition is symmetrical, the parallels on both sides can be described together.

a-f and f′-a′ = down from the sides of the Tree, along the first Dikpālas, Śiva's shoulders and (a-f) along his left vertical arm. Between these two lines are all essential parts of Śiva's figure, his trunk to the width of the shoulders and his first left arm, his head with the halo and the sacred Tree, besides the middle portion of the throne with the central lion.

B-F and F′-B′ = descend along the second Dikpālas and Śiva's outer hands to the outer edges of the throne. They mark the width of the throne, the outer limit of the hand holding the snake and the middle of the hand holding the nīlotpala. The interspaces contain the outer arms of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the two first Lokapālas on either side, Īśāna and Indra, and the two outer lions of the throne.

b-e and e′-b′ = run along the compact vertical sequence of figures, Yakṣas, Ṛṣis and outer Lokapālas, piled upon one another like a living column along the two side-pilasters and connecting their bases with the brackets above. The interspaces contain the deep shadowy recesses by the sides of the throne in which the second Yakṣas are seated, half hidden behind the throne. Above they contain on the left side the figure of Yama and on the right the third Ṛṣi, Agni and Vāyu.

C-E and E′-C′ = run from the middle of the brackets to the bases of the side-pilasters, and form a kind of axis through the vertical array of figures on both sides.

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[1] Transl. by A. K. Coomaraswamy.

[2] Transl. by Dr. E. Röer.

The whole panel appears thus divided into five vertical sections, reaching from bottom to top, alternately projecting and receding. The central part and the two sides come forward in big and compact masses, single in the centre and aggregate on the sides. The two receding spaces between them have thinner and more scattered forms. Such a space-division is eminently static and architectonic.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = across Śiva's chest, armpits and the wrists of his two lateral raised hands, ending on both sides on the shoulders of the Ṛṣis.

Madhya-bindu = in the middle of Śiva's breast, in his Prāṇacakra.

c′-d = passes across Śiva's navel and below his elbows, below the seats of the Ṛṣis dividing them from the Yakṣas. The interspace holds the bodies of four Ṛṣis, the middle of Śiva's trunk and the corresponding part of his arms.

C′-E = runs along the line of Śiva's shins, dividing them from the lotus-throne, and below the shoulders of the Yakṣas. The interspace holds the legs of Śiva and the heads of the Yakṣas.

b′-e = along the cornice of the throne above the heads of the lions and along the lower limits of the Yakṣas' arms. The interspace holds the upper part of the throne and the trunks of the Yakṣas down to their knees. The two lowest interspaces hold the vertical part of the throne with the three lions, the legs of the Yakṣas and the platform on which the composition stands.

d′-c = above the centre, from the head of the third Ṛṣi on the right to the head of Nirṛti's vāhana on the left. The interspace contains the heads of all Ṛṣis, Śiva's shoulder and neck, his raised hands and the vāhanas of the outermost Dikpālas on either side.

E′-C = from Varuṇa's head to the head of Nirṛti, across the heads of almost all the other Dikpālas' vāhanas. The interspace contains the figures of Varuṇa and Nirṛti, the bodies or legs of the vāhanas and Śiva's head from the nose to the middle of the mukuṭa.

e′-b = through the top of Śiva's mukuṭa, the heads of the right Dikpālas and the shoulders of the left Dikpālas. The line marks the lower limit of the brackets. The Brahman-tree and the heads and arms of two left Dikpālas reach into the uppermost space division.

The horizontal build-up is divided into three strata, corresponding to the three lokas or planes of existence. The first four interspaces from the ground to the heads of the Yakṣas represent the region of the Earth (bhū), the next two interspaces to the top of the Ṛṣis' jaṭās the Middle Space (antarikṣa), the four uppermost interspaces represent the Heavenly Regions (svar), which include not only the Lokapālas, but also Dakṣiṇāmūrti's head, his jaṭāmukuṭa and the crown of the Brahman-tree.

The Lokapālas show a great variety of individual shapes and movements, in spite of which their arrangement and disposition preserve a remarkable degree of symmetry and correspondence.

At the centre of this vertical-horizontal array a space is kept clear for the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti. This space is within two rectangles, one above the other. The lower is horizontal, it has the width of the throne and reaches from the base of the panel to the level of the horizontal c′-d, and the upper, narrower one is upright, confined between the vertical lines f′-a′ and a-f, or the two first Dikpālas, and reaching up to the top of the panel. The figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti occupies a central triangle connecting these two rectangles. Its apex is at point A above the Brahman-tree and its base lies along Śiva's legs on the central part of the horizontal C′-E. The sides of the triangle run along the slant of his outermost arms.

Besides the vertical-horizontal space-division there is a concentric disposition in the figures surrounding Dakṣiṇāmūrti, which makes them appear like a maṇḍala. But since movement is also involved in those radiating lines, they will be described in the Time-Division.

Although the big masses in this composition are disposed symmetrically and the entire build-up is strictly geometrical, the infinite variety of all smaller forms and the perfect ease of their movements dissolve all rigidity and keep the composition throughout fluid, living and breathing.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXIIb

Essential diameters: a-a′ and f′-f.

In a static, self-centred composition as this, the pattern of oblique inner movements can never completely conceal the fundamental vertical-horizontal scaffolding. Since the movements are symmetrical, the two complementary diameters that govern them can be dealt with together.

a-a′ and f′-f = cross in the middle of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's chest and form two narrow triangles which open upwards and downwards and have the madhya-sūtra as their axis. The upper triangle encloses the face, head and mukuṭa of Śiva together with the Heavenly Tree. The lower encloses the two middle pillars of the throne together with the central lion.

A-F and A-B′ = form a triangle with apex at the top and base at the bottom of the panel, which encloses the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti and picks him out as the central core of the composition. Its sides descend along the mukuṭa and the lines of his inner arms to the edges at the base of the throne.

f′-b′ and a-e = descend from the edges of the Brahman-Tree through the axis of movement of Īśāna and of Indra and their vāhanas, through Dakṣiṇāmūrti's uppermost hands to the feet of the first Yakṣas.

F′-C′ and B-E = descend from the heads of Agni and Yama to the lowest corners of the panel. The line F′-C′ is traceable through the shadow along Agni's figure and the makara's open jaws, between the shins of the two seated Ṛṣis and between the body and upper arm of the Yakṣa with the drum. B-E descends instead through the axis of Yama's figure, along the foreleg of his buffalo, the inclined head of the second Ṛṣi and between body and upper arm of the Yakṣa.

Of the two outermost parallels:

e′-c′ = descends from the raised hands of Vāyu along the head of his antelope, the front-line of Varuṇa to the back of the outermost Ṛṣi's seat.

b-d = from the horn of Yama's buffalo along Kubera's raised arm to the arm of the outermost Ṛṣi and the back of his seat.

The complementary movement is directed by the triangle F′-A′-B and its parallels.

A′-F and A′-B = form an inverted triangle with vertex below the central lion. Its sides are running up along the front-lines of Yama and Agni.

a′-e′ and f-b = run up between body and thigh of the outer lions, then along the lines of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's arms raised on either side with the snake and the nīlotpala, on the right side as axis through Vāyu's body and on the left between Yama and Kubera to the inner front of the brackets.

These two lines which measure the width of the panel between the brackets, have, like verticals and horizontals, structural functions, since they refer both to the sculpture and the enclosing architecture and thus help to establish a connection between them. Equally significant in this sense are the next parallels B′-E′ and F-C, because they connect the base of the throne with the roots of the brackets and the upper corners of the panel.

b′-d′ and e-c = follow the slant from the foremost Yakṣa to the Ṛṣi above. The slant of all these lines opening from below in the direction of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's raised arms loosen up and widen the austerely closed triangle of his figure. Crossing on the madhya-prastha the parallels of the upright triangle described before, they form, together with the horizontals above and below, a series of ever widening hexagons. The central hexagon is framing in the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, his raised hands occupying the outer corners. The outer ones, as they expand, embrace more and more of the surrounding figures into a shifting and ever widening symmetry.

For the concentric movements, which are also discernible in this panel, we have to come back to Plate XXIIa. The two sectors opening up- and downward from Śiva's Prāṇacakra have already been described. From the uppermost sector downwards to the right and the left, the next four sectors on either side, between a and c and between f′ and d′ contain all Lokapālas, four on either side.

The next two sectors between c and d and between d′ and c′, divided by the madhya-prastha, contain a group of Ṛṣis on either side. The following three sectors, between d and F and between c′ and B′, down to the edges of the throne, are occupied by the Yakṣas.

Finally the four lowest sectors, between B′- and F comprise the entire width of the throne.

This radial division does not only indicate the positions of the smaller figures surrounding Śiva, but also their movements and single features, which all participate to a greater or lesser extent in this convergence towards the centre. The three lions, for instance, converge in perspective towards the centre, since the middle one is in front-view, on the central axis of the main figure and the two others are in three quarter view, with their tails pointing towards the centre. The Yakṣas are seated obliquely one behind the other in the direction of Śiva. The Ṛṣis also are seated obliquely in depth and turned towards him. The Lokapālas descend and converge towards Śiva from different quarters of the compass, those nearest to him coming forward in front-view whereby either the direction of their movements, or their gestures and attitudes point towards the central figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

This not only creates a compelling cohesion between the central and the peripheral figures, but also a kind of receding perspective, which breaks the wall of rock behind Dakṣiṇāmūrti into an unfathomable depth of space, from where all figures appear to be moving forward towards the Great Yogin. The deepening space adds a new dimension to the image and sets the Tree and the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti deliberately in the centre of a three-dimensional universe. This makes their central polar position with respect to all manifestation quite unassailable.

Integration and Interpretation

Like the Mahālakṣmī images in Kailāsanātha Temple and in Cave XIV, this composition is built up in three successive horizontal layers, one above the other, holding in their centre the pyramidal form of the main figure. Unlike the others, however, the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti is not confined to the middle horizontal space, but, being of one cast with the Lion-throne and the Brahman-Tree, it extends through all three layers and reaches from the ground to the top of the panel.

The lowest layer, reaching from the ground to the navel of Dakṣiṇāmūrti and the heads of the Yakṣas, has its emphasis on the horizontal extension. It represents the earth-plane (bhū), the substratum of all Life, where the Cosmic Soul lies enshrined in the bhūtas (elements) as phenomenal existence. This region is represented by the Yakṣas, Lords and Protectors of the Earth, dwelling in their underground caverns. The lion-throne is not above, but deeply rooted in the foundations of the Earth, and Dakṣiṇāmūrti's legs, lying flat on the throne, participate in its horizontal extension. The throne with the lotus-seat and Śiva's legs form one solid rectangle, broken, in its lowest part only, into three square compartments containing the lions. This horizontal rectangular block is separated by deep shadowy recesses from the Yakṣas on either side, who, squatting low into the earth, are shaped into vertical rectangular blocks. Squareness is known as the symbolic attribute of Earth, the ground and foundation of all that exists.

The second layer, reaching up to the shoulders of Śiva and to the heads of the Munis, is characterized by the vertical ascent of Śiva's upper body. His trunk, rising like a pillar, broadens upward from waist to shoulders. At the shoulders the soaring movement is arrested and diverted outwards and downwards into the slant of the arms fanning out on both sides. Only the outline of his flanks is projected and prolonged upwards into that of the flat halo surrounding his head. This crossing of currents at the shoulders, directed up- and downwards, is present also in the figure of Lakṣmī in the same temple. It takes place in the region of the middle-space (bhuvar or antarikṣa) where conscious aspiration struggles upward, while divine Prāṇa flows downward to penetrate earthbound existence with its redeeming breath. Here dwell the Ṛṣis and Yogins and all liberated souls, and the arms of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, reaching out in long, rounded and gentle movements transmit to them the flow of his Grace.

In the uppermost region the ascent is straight and free like that of a jet of water. The head of Śiva and the trunk of the Tree are compressed into one round, narrow, vertical aspiration crowned by the roots or branches of the Brahman Tree as with a royal umbrella. This is the region of Heaven, of pure Consciousness, where the head of Śiva and the Brahman-Tree are one. The Dikpālas surrounding Śiva and the Tree are arrayed in a semi-circle like the dome of Heaven. As embodiments of the eight directions of space they represent the ubiquity of Heaven, and by analogy, the all-pervasiveness of the Spirit. Their movements are aerial, quick and lively, unhampered by weight or other material contingencies.

The figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti at the centre of the three worlds is established as an upright triangle. In the Tantras the upright triangle is the Śiva trikoṇa, the symbol of the pure Essence of the Supreme, when resting in Sat-Cit-Ānanda without creative stress. As the three ascending forms of his trunk and his arms are converging into the shoulders, it is as if he were assembling into one the triune aspects of his power. Creation, Maintainance and Dissolution, the three phases or currents are flowing together into the one head, the seat of supreme Consciousness.

Within the triangle circumscribing the figure of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, a definite stress is laid upon the vertical axis, which, through the head and the towering mukuṭa is carried up into the Brahman-Tree, establishing the identity of both and emphasizing the polar, sustaining aspect of Dakṣiṇāmūrti. The vertical stands for Cit (Consciousness), Fire, the Light of Heaven, Puruṣa, the Absolute. The horizontal stands for Ābhāsa (reflection) in the lower Waters, the Sea of possibilities, Prakṛti, the Conditioned, from which emerges the world of manifested form. The vertical of his trunk and head and the horizontal of his legs crossed upon the lion-throne, go to form the basic, fundamental, eternal cross of Spirit and Matter, which underlies all existence.

The yogic āsana, the erect seat with interlocked legs and poised arms represents essentially the inflow, intension, withdrawal and concentration of energy. In Buddha imagery this posture of the Dhyānī Buddha, wherein all extraverted activity is extinguished and the flow of life circles within the folded-up limbs, is conceived as despiration, the breathing out of the flame of will, in complete relinquishment of all ties with the world of forms and the merging of the whole being into pure Consciousness. This is called the Great Awakening, the Mahāsaṁbodhi, where individual consciousness is transferred integrally from the world of matter to the World of pure Light. In the Paramātman, however, whose eternal inalienable Essence is pure Consciousness and Light, despiration, outbreathing on the contrary corresponds to the outflow of Manifestation. It is his inbreathing that represents the reabsorption of the world of created things into the Unmanifest. That is why Dakṣiṇāmūrti is represented here in the act of breathing in, with expanded chest, absorbing into himself what in future aeons, at his pleasure, he may pour out again.

As he is seated addorsed to the Tree of Brahman, the central pillar of the Universe, and as he is turned towards the South, (Dakṣiṇā =

South) he is understood to be seated in the North, upon the Pole, around which all the worlds revolve. The Pole corresponds to Mount Meru, the central axis and support of the universe from which all worlds are seen to lie to the South. In the esoteric sense, he whose aspect is turned southward implies: one who looks from above downwards, and, who looks from within outwards. [1]

Identified with the immovable centre of all manifestation, he gathers into himself all directions of Space and suppresses them, he collects into himself all phases of Time and annihilates them. In him, all movements and all sequences are inflowing and subsiding as rivers in the ocean. Towards this Pole of all existence, this Essence of all Being, the creatures of the three worlds are drawn by an irresistible attraction. The cavalcade of the gods converging from all quarters of Heaven, the silent Munis, peacefully settling by his side, the Yakṣas in the underground caves rejoicing with musical instruments, all are pouring their life, their being into his.

His form, radiating with joy, is like a powerful magnet attracting into its orbit all that exists, and the inflow from all quarters is blissfully obeying this centripetal force of intension, involution and absorption. Even the Brahman-Tree appears as if sucked into his body. Soft as algae its roots withdraw into the jaṭāmukuṭa crowning his head while the jaṭās resemble cascades of amṛta falling from Heaven. All individual prāṇas (life-breaths) are exhaled into him and drawn into the universal Prāṇa in his expanded chest. The centre of the whole composition, towards which the circle of all surrounding figures is converging, is in Śiva's Prāṇa-cakra, the seat of the Lifebreath.

The throne of the supreme Yogin is established upon the centre of the Earth, that is to say, upon the breadth and depth of the manifested worlds. His throne is the lion-throne of Royalty, which qualifies him as the repository of supreme power and universal authority. It is tripartite, which may be a reference to the three worlds, the tribhuvana, over which he is the Lord, or to the triune aspect of his power, symbolised as Fire, Sun and Vāyu, or as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra, or as Īśvara, Hiraṇyagarbha, Virāṭ, etc. [2]

Its very form, broad and square, is a symbol of unshakable firmness at the centre of flux and transmutation. The square, besides being the connotation of the earth-cakra, becomes at the end of a cosmic revolution, the symbol of re-integration into the primal Essence, the final equilibrium at the end of all manifestation [1].

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[1] For further elucidation of this point see A. K. Coomaraswamy: A New Approach to the Vedas, Note 65 and appendix.

[2] See: A. K. Coomaraswamy: A New Approach to the Vedas, p. 12 and foll.

The throne is guarded by three lions, that means it is unassailable from outside, impregnable. The lions, symbols of the Sun, the luminous principle, destroyers of darkness, defend its approaches. It is therefore the same as the throne of Brahmā, which in the Kauṣitaki Up. is called Vicakṣana = Intellect, Discernment, Omniscience, and Brahmā, established upon it, is Prāṇa, the Innermost.

The lotus, upon which the divine Yogin is seated represents the eternal Dharma, the Logos, the OṀ, the ground whereon and the space wherein all existence is unfolded. On this Lotus rests Supreme Reality, in the likeness of the pillar of the universe, incorporated in the erect body of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

The essence of Buddha images is shown as adamantine self-centredness in the depth of samādhi, as perfect equilibrium of quiescence, as complete abstraction from the outer world. And when after his Enlightenment the Buddha turns again to the world to teach the Dharma, it is in aloof and trancelike gestures (bhūmi-sparśa, vyākhyāna, varada mudrās) that this outgoing is depicted.

In the Jñāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti image self-centredness is intrinsically coupled with an active outflow of energy manifested through the gestures and attributes of his eight hands.

The uppermost right hand, now half broken, must have been, according to iconographic rules, in haṁsasya mudrā which means: So ham (That am I). This is also called vyākhyāna or cin-mudrā, because the raised index is showing the unity of being in the supreme Essence, from which all plurality devolves. The lower left hand, lying open on the left leg is in varada mudrā (bestowing boons), the open palm of mercy and compassion, offering rescue from the wheel of saṁsāra.

The next pair of arms is hanging down to the knees and the hands are broken off. If, as is probable, they were holding the Vedas and an amṛtaghaṭaka (vessel of Immortality), they were offering the revealed Divine Law and through it, freedom from death, the essence of Immortality.

Of the next pair of arms, the left one is reaching out with a gesture of love towards the silent Yogins. In its open palm he is holding the Jīvanmuktas, who have crossed beyond the world of Māyā, who have overcome the pair of opposites and have realised the Self in the oneness with the Supreme Being. "When resting there they lose themselves and become idle.... Where the idlers dwell, is the pure Space. Where the idlers sport is the Light. What the idlers know is Vedānta. What the idlers find is the deep sleep therein."[1] For them who have thus become idle this hand is building a bridge over which to cross into the heart of the Supreme, never to return.

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[1] See: René Guénon: Le Roi du Monde, pp. 130 and 131.

The right corresponding hand is holding up to the other group of Munis the akṣamālā, the string of thirty-six tattvas, or stages of evolution through which Paramaśiva unfolds himself into the manifold worlds, and through which, in the reverse order, he finally reintegrates the multiplicity of things into primordial, essential Unity.

The two uppermost hands hold a snake and a nīlotpala respectively. These hands point upward towards the region of Heaven and are curving in towards the central pillar, like the petals of a flower closing at night. The nīlotpala is the night-lotus, sacred to the Moon. It represents Soma, the watery Life-substance, associated with the Iḍā nāḍī on the left. The snake winding upwards represents Agni, the fiery Life-principle, the Sun, associated with the Piṅgalā nāḍī on the right.

This closing in movement resembling a lotus-flower is perceptible throughout the panel. The body of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, from the waist up to the crown of the Tree is the pistil, and the abdomen below the waistband the swelling pericarp of this immense flower, into which the pollen, all the karma of the universe, is gathered to rest until the time when it will ripen into seed and come forth again as the next cycle of manifestation. The softly curving arms are the stamens and all the surrounding figures the petals closing in towards the seed-vessel, the central organ of the flower, where its life-essence is gathered up and preserved.

This calls to mind, but with an inverse connotation, the image of Brahmā, the Creator, who emerges from the centre of the lotus sprung from the navel of Nārāyaṇa recumbent on the primordial Waters. If the opening of the lotus-flower there signifies the growing, the procession of the universe from the Unmanifest, the closing of the lotus here means the recession of existence into the peace of the Supreme. Dakṣiṇāmūrti

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[1] Quoted from Tirumalūr by A. K. Coomaraswamy in "The Dance of Śiva", p. 89.

Śiva is none other than the supreme Brahman, folding up into his lap all existence that had emanated from him.

If the lotus is, on the one hand, an image of the Cosmos, on the other hand it also stands for the Antaryāmin, the infinitesimal space within the heart, wherein all the worlds are contained. "This lotus of the Heart (hṛt-puṣkara) is verily the same as Space (ākāśa), these four quarters and interquarters are its surrounding petals". (Maitri Up. VI. 2.)[1] "In this Space (ākāśa) coextensive with Space-in-the-Heart (antarhṛdayākāśa) are contained both Heaven and Earth... all is contained therein". (Cāndogya Up. VIII 1-3.)[1]

In the representation of the Dhyānī-Buddha, the human state of identification with the Supreme, the eyes are almost or entirely closed. "The great Person sat there alone and beheld the tenthousand world-systems, the world-picture, none therein beheld him, unless it were in a likeness".

(Coomaraswamy: Buddhist Iconography.)

The eyes of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, however, are wide open. In this image the movement of reabsorption, integration and unification is presented as being in flux throughout the three worlds. The process of involution has reached the stage of Īśvara Tattva, where is the seat of Unmeṣa Śakti (with opening eyes) and where some differentiation between Ahaṃ and Idaṃ (the Self and the other) still remains. Only beyond such differentiation lies complete identification. The light that emanates from Him, shoots up into Heaven like a fiery pillar through the mukuṭa and the roots of the World-Tree, which are spreading on the summit like the flames of Pralaya. "The Fiery-Energy (tejas), intrinsic-form of the firmament, in the vacance of the inner man, determined as the Trinity of Fire, Supernal-Sun and Spirit, three factors of the Imperishable Word, OṂ, sprouts forth, springs up, and suspires (or blossoms) as a Burning Bush, the all-pervading Tree of Life". (Maitri Up.).[1] This central pillar of Light, which appears like the Jyotir-liṅgam with its devouring flames also represents the Suṣumnā nāḍī, and the Devatas, the Ṛṣis and the spirits of the Earth are drawn towards it from all quarters to be consumed in the fire of Immortality.

As the hands of Dakṣiṇāmūrti are reaching out in soft rounded gestures and are lovingly drawing towards his heart the created beings, the children of his Will, another image presents itself to the mind: The arms are similar to the ropes, by which the victims are tied to the sacrificial post. In Vedic symbolism sacrifice is the bond that ties the creature to its Creator, to the centre, the heart of the Supreme Being: While in the outpouring of Manifestation (pravṛtti mārga) the sacrifice of Puruṣa, of the Godhead is symbolically implied, in the return and reintegration with the Supreme Essence, the sacrifice of the creature is actually involved.

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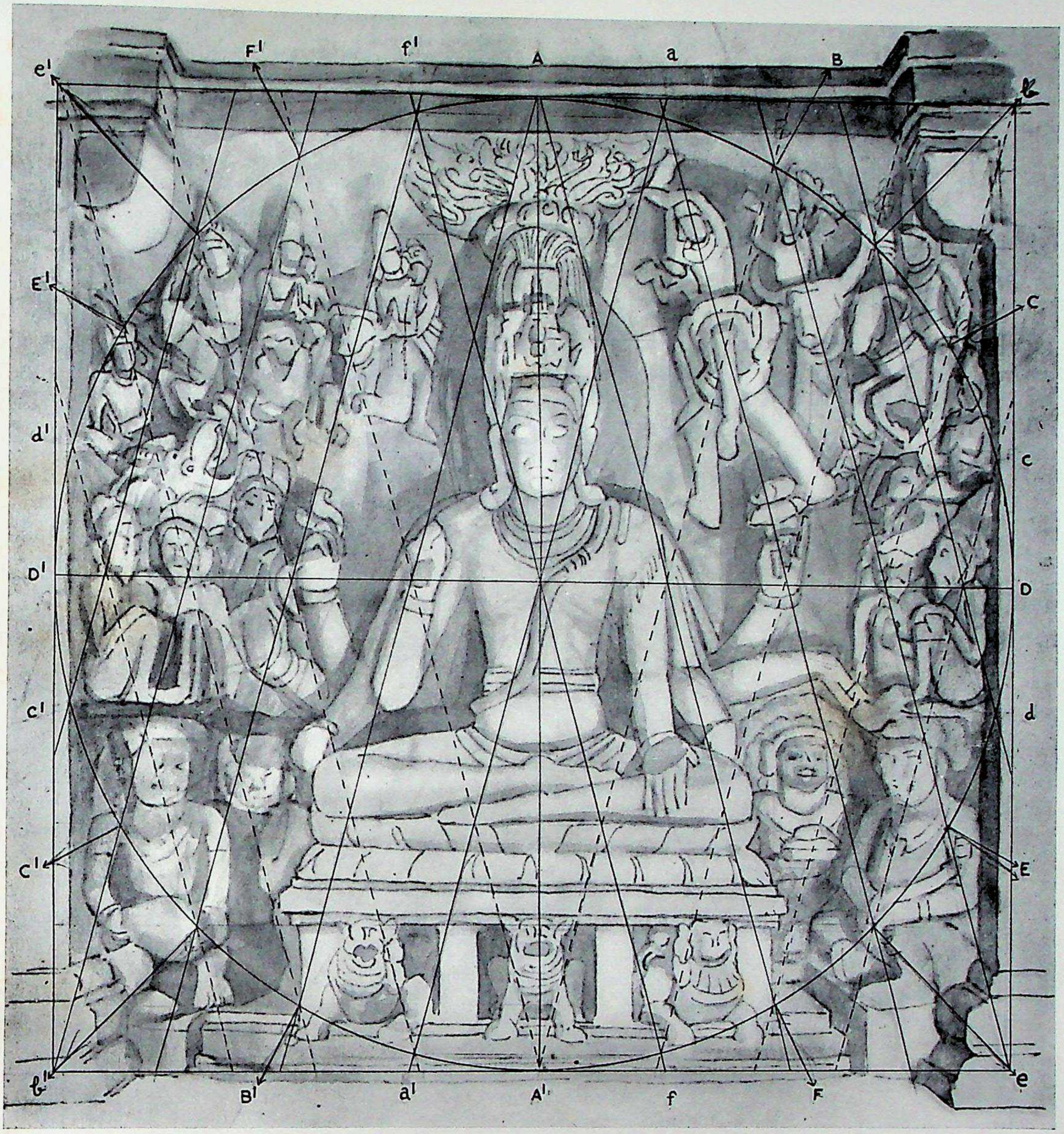
[1] Transl. by A. K. Coomaraswamy.

In vedic texts the sacrificial post is often spoken of as Vanaspati (Lord of the forest). The three parts of the post, base, middle and top, correspond to the three worlds. It was, according to A. K. Coomaraswamy, envisaged as the Tree of Life, the body of Prajāpati, its trunk being the axis of the Universe, the support of all existence. Here the Brahman-Tree forms the central pillar, the composition's central point of reference. In the radial disposition of all the figures, which surround Dakṣiṇāmūrti like a prabhāmaṇḍala, a concentric movement is converging towards him. In symbolical figuration, a movement from the circumference towards the centre, from the felloe to the nave of the wheel, may always be understood as implying a recession from the manifold outer world towards unification in the one supreme Essence. It expresses the attraction exercised by the Divine Essence on all its manifestations, and their desire to be reintegrated and reestablished in it. With reference to the individual soul, it signifies the way of return from the endless whirl of changing existences to the inner Pole of being, to the peace of pure Consciousness. It is the nivṛtti-mārga of those who, having exhausted their karma, are turning away from worldly life and are gravitating towards the unfathomable centre of rest, in the union with the Eternal.

It is interesting to note how in this image two entirely different styles of plastic treatment are blended into one grand and significant harmony. The form-language used for those elements of the image that represent the Principle is quite different from that used for the elements representing the world of manifestation. The solemn grandeur of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's figure is not dependent on its dimensions alone, nor upon the majestic symmetry of his hieratic attitude. It is due just as much to the strictly summarized and simplified treatment of form, which turns his presence, without impairing the inner glow, into an almost geometrical abstraction. The geometrical abstraction endows the image with the validity and inevitability of cosmic law, the unchanging, absolute and eternal Principle. In utter contrast with the treatment of Dakṣiṇāmūrti's form is that of the smaller figures surrounding him. Here an animated realism faithfully depicts the peculiarities of their individual features, insisting, not without a sense of humour, on what is unmistakably human and quaint in their appearance. This realistic treatment shows them definitely as appertaining to this world of relativity and limitation. It might be argued, that if this be the case, the Dikpālas, as heavenly beings and the Yakṣas as superhuman beings, should have escaped such realistic treatment. But since their divinity belongs to the cosmic order, and that of Śiva to the supracosmic, spiritual order, their treatment could not have been of another kind, if a distinction of categories had to be maintained.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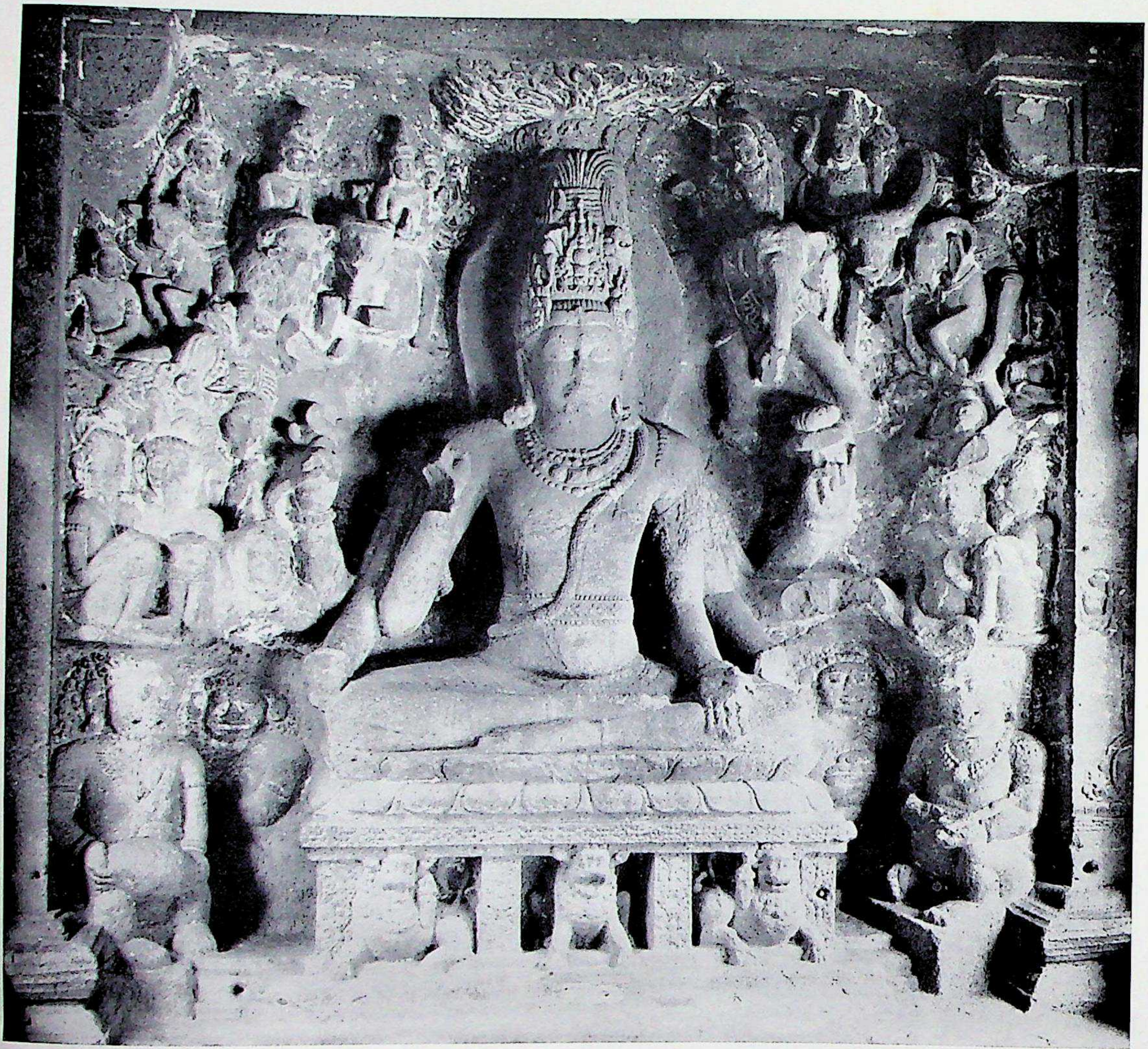
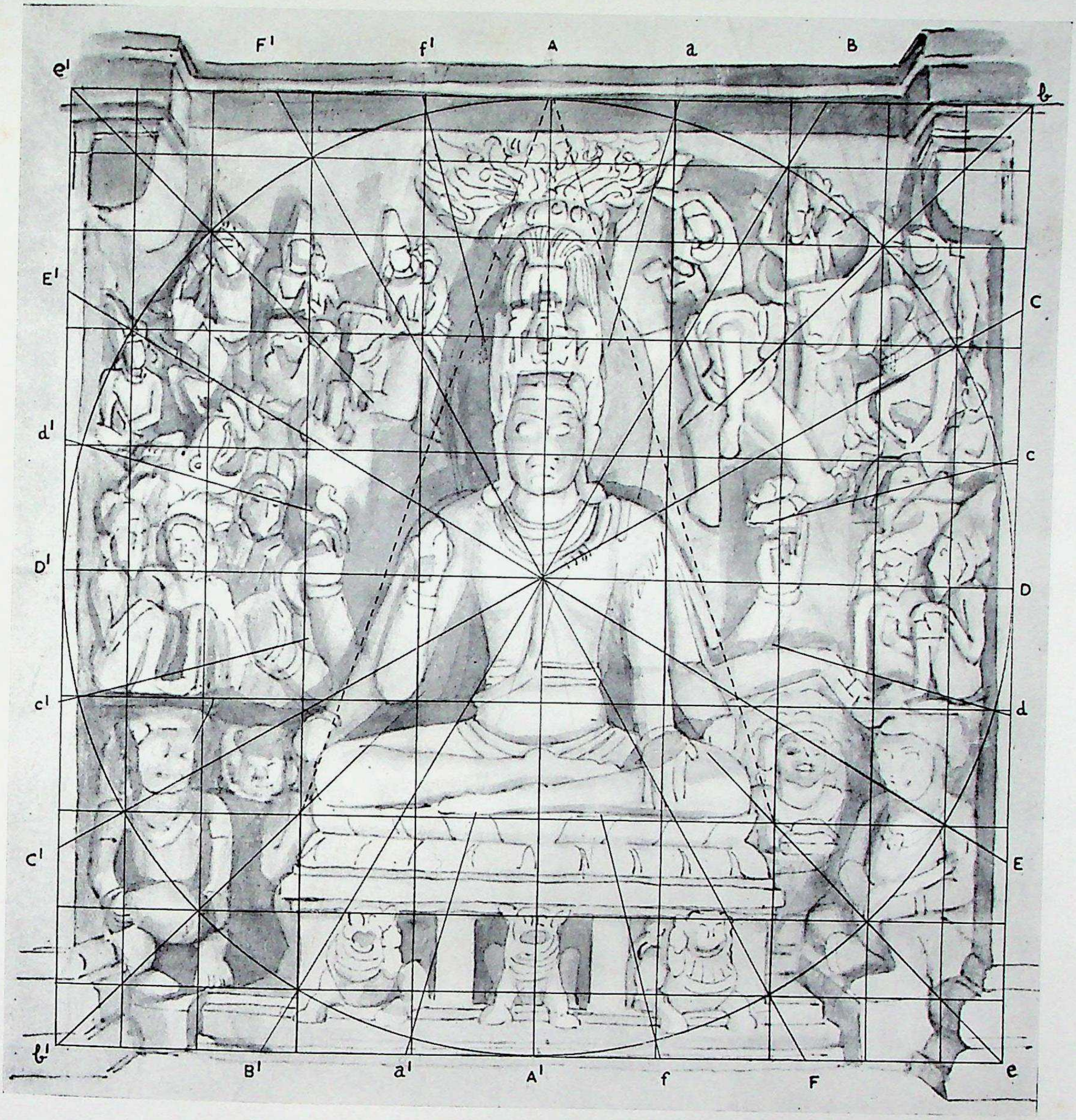
b. TIME DIVISION



JÑĀNA-DAKṢIṆĀMŪRTI, ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE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a. SPACE DIVISION

CHAPTER NINETEEN

GAJASAṀHĀRAMŪRTI

ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE, 8TH-9TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XXIII

Although this sculpture is popularly called Kāla-Bhairava, and although the figure of Andhakāsura is absent from the composition, the presence of the Devī, the Saptamātṛkās and the elephant-skin held by Śiva seem rather to refer to Śiva's victory over Gajāsura and Andhakāsura.

The Paurāṇic story relates how the Daitya Andhakāsura had, by devotion to Brahmā, become so powerful that he caused annoyance to the gods. These went to Śiva to complain and to implore his help. In the meantime Andhakāsura, in his arrogance, appeared himself in Kailāsa, intending to abduct Pārvatī with the help of the Asura Nīla, who had taken the form of an elephant. Śiva killed Nīla (the Gajāsura), and after having stripped the skin from his body, took it as his upper garment. Then he grasped his triśūla and went against Andhakāsura with his army of Gaṇas. But when he pierced the enemy with his triśūla, every drop of blood that fell upon the earth, instantly grew into another Andhakāsura. Thus they multiplied by thousands. From the flames of his mouth Śiva then created the Śakti Yogeśvarī to collect the drops of blood before they fell to earth. Indra and other Devas also sent their Śaktis for the same purpose. The seven Matṛkās caught all the drops of blood and stopped further multiplying of the Asuras. Thus Andhakāsura lost his power, and while Viṣṇu destroyed the secondary Asuras with his cakra, Śiva pierced the original Andhakāsura with his triśūla, and after defeating him, began to dance.

This is the moment that appears to be represented. Śiva is swinging the elephant skin over his head in the frenzy of a war-dance. Of his ten arms the upper four hold the skin, while the two front ones are pressed with clenched fists on his hip and thigh. The right hand clutches the tusk torn from the elephant. The two remaining right hands hold triśūla and ḍamaru, of the corresponding left hands one holds a kapāla, and the other is caressing the cheek of Cinmāyā Devī. She is the same as Yogeśvarī, the Śakti of Śiva, but is shown in her peaceful, serene aspect, which she resumed after the fight was over. The elephant-skin forms a circular frame around Śiva, with head and frontlegs on the right, tail and hindlegs hanging on the left side. The Saptamātṛkās are seated in a row below Śiva's right raised foot, and Bhṛṅgī, his faithful follower, dances between his legs. Another emaciated Yogin approaches the Devī in worshipful attitude, while by the side of Śiva's head two Gaṇas raise their hands in joy at his victory.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XXIIIa

The panel is an exact square. The directing circle is coextensive with the square and is divided by twelve diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = through the right side of Śiva's face and the left side of his trunk, down between his legs along the line of the drapery, through the centre of Bhṛngi's figure and ending on the front of the last Mātṛkā.

f′-a′ = runs between the right side of Śiva's jaṭāmaṇḍala, through his shoulder and his thigh along the drapery, through his right heel and the Gaṇa below, and ends between the fourth and the fifth Mātṛkā.

a-f = between the left side of the jaṭāmaṇḍala and the Gaṇa down along his left arm and left thigh to the heel of his left foot.

These three lines demarcate the vertical middle-space of the panel, and they contain also the central and weightiest part of Śiva's body: his head with the jaṭāmaṇḍala, his trunk and shoulders, his hips wrapped in the curve of the drapery, his left fist and left thigh, Bhṛṅgī with his companions and three of the Mātṛkās.

F′-B′ = from Śiva's uppermost vertical forearm, down across the other arms and the knee, through the small Gaṇa below, ending along the side of the second Mātṛkā. The interspace contains the Gaṇa on Śiva's shoulder, his upper right arms, his right leg and the two central Mātṛkās.

e′-b′ = marks the outer limit of Śiva's second raised hand, the wrist of his hand holding the triśūla, the front of the elephant's head and the axis of the first Mātṛkā's body. The second hand holding the elephant skin is exactly enclosed between this and the previous line.

E′-C′ = from the outer limit of the triśūla and the hand with the ḍamaru down to the ear of the elephant and the base of the wall-pilaster. The interspace contains the triśūla, the hand with the ḍamaru and the head of the elephant. Beyond it are the skin and the leg of the elephant, joined and almost forming part of the wall-pilaster.

On the left side:

B-F = along the outline of the Gaṇa near Śiva's head, across all four arms of Śiva, along the outline of the Yogin and of the small Gaṇa below his feet. The two Gaṇas on either side of Śiva's head are contained in exactly corresponding vertical space-divisions, although one is slightly bigger than the other.

b-e = marks the outer limit of Śiva's first raised hand, the inner limit of the second hand, the axis of the Devī's body, and the front-edge of her throne. This line, like its counterpart e′-b′ is a dividing line between the middle space occupied by Śiva and the lateral form-complexes.

C-E = down along the elephant's hind leg, through hand and ankle of the Devī to the base of the wall-pilaster. The interspace contains Śiva's outermost hands, halt ot the Devī's body and the lion on the front of her throne. Her raised leg and the elephant's hind leg lie in the outermost space, addorsed to the wall-pilaster. These forms, which on either side run along the vertical of the pilaster terminate in the arch of the elephant skin, forming a frame around the central figure of Śiva.

Horizontals

Madhya-prastha = from Gajāsura's head along the horizontal extension of Śiva's right thigh, across his hip along the belt-line, along the horizontal arm holding the kapāla above the head of the Devī.

The madhya-prastha divides the panel into two halves with different connotations, leaving a gap between them. The lower half is determined by upright or ascending forms, the elephant, the legs of Śiva, the Devī and the smaller figures moving between them. The upper half is determined by transversally spreading forms, the shoulders of Śiva and his arms reaching from side to side, as well as his expanding chest and his jaṭāmaṇḍala. Only his lowest left arm is trespassing into the lower half, and its movement is flowing down into the head and the arm of the Devī, as a formal and vital link between the upper and the lower parts.

Madhya-bindu = on the knot of Śiva's belt, slightly to the left of the skull-garland falling from his shoulder. It is not quite clear whether it can be identified with the Mūlādhāra-cakra, as in other Saṁhāra-mūrtis, but it certainly represents the central point of stress, from where the trunk and the two legs break asunder in three different directions, and is therefore a point of vital dynamic importance.

c′-d = from the lower end of the elephant's ears along the drapery between Śiva's legs to the shoulder of the Yogin and the outer elbow of the Devī. The interspace contains the face of the Gajāsura, the raised right leg of Śiva and his lowest left arm touching the Devī.

C′-E = touches the more or less horizontal forms of Śiva's raised foot, of Bhṛṅgī's daṇḍa-hasta and of the Devī's right thigh resting on the lotus throne.

b′-e = connects the projecting bases of the side-pilasters and passes along the shoulder-line of the Mātṛkās, across the knee of Bhṛṅgī and below the cornice of the Devī's throne.

B′-F = divides the ground from the vertical portion of the panel. The interspace holds the torsos of the Mātṛkās and the vertical portion of the Devī's throne. What is below lies horizontally on the ground.

Above the centre:

d′-c = along the third right upper arm of Śiva, across his breast-line and through the second left upper arm. The interspace contains the middle of Śiva's body, his two closed fists and the hands holding kapāla and triśūla.

E′-C = from the hand with the ḍamaru along Śiva's right shoulder and armline, along the left Gaṇa's thigh to Śiva's hand holding the elephant-skin. The interspace contains Śiva's chest and two of his extended arms on either side, the right reaching above and those on the left sinking below the line, in accordance with the inclination of the shoulders.

e′-b = from the wrists of Śiva's raised right hands across his brow and the shoulders of the Gaṇas to the uppermost left hand. The interspace contains the head of the triśūla, Śiva's raised forearms, his face and the bodies of the Gaṇas.

The two uppermost interspaces contain the top of Śiva's jaṭāmaṇḍala, his uppermost hands, the heads of the Gaṇas and, arching over them all, the skin of the elephant.

A square inscribed into the directing circle, from the points where the diagonals b-b′ and e′-e cross the circle is important as an inner constructive frame-work. It encloses the entire figure of Śiva, less some of his outer hands. The wrists of his second right and first left upper hand mark the upper corners of the square. The sides divide Śiva from the lateral groups of Gajāsura and the Devī, and the ground-line divides him from the Mātṛkās. On the whole the Space-division reveals symmetrical correspondences that help to stabilize the composition in spite of all dynamic movement. Although the arms are placed in a slant and reach higher on the right side than on the left, they are so placed that the first left and the second right hand come to stand opposite one another on approximately the same level. And such is the case also with the third left hand holding the kapāla and the fourth right hand holding the triśūla, both just above the madhya-prastha. Śiva's head is slanting out of the middle-line, but the jaṭāmaṇḍala, being broader on one side than on the other, readjusts its central position. The Devī and the Gajāsura constitute two vertical form blocks on either side of the panel, which, together with the solid horizontal lines of the Mātṛkā-group and of the Devī's throne, give a firm and consistent base to the composition.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXIIIb

Essential diameters: f-f′, a′a, d-d′, c′-c.
In this composition the intermediate diameters are exclusively used.

f-f′ = along the inner side of Śiva's left leg and up through his body to his right shoulder and his jaṭāmaṇḍala.

This line determines the essential slant of Śiva's body. The movement from foot to hip runs on the left side of the diameter up to the madhyaprastha. From there it shifts to the right side and continues in the right flank of Śiva from hip to shoulder. Then it is carried further up into the jaṭāmaṇḍala, which is arching upwards around Śiva's head. This single strain running through different form-elements is the backbone of the composition, dividing it from bottom to top in two equal halves.

F-A = forms the axis of Śiva's left upper arm, doubling and sustaining the slant of the body. The drapery falling along his leg, and the Gaṇa below it, arms and legs of the Yogin, all follow this slant.

e-a = slant from the edge of the Devī's throne to her hip and shoulder, across the wristlet of Śiva's lowest arm and the bracelet of his highest arm to the right flank of the Gaṇa.

E-B = slant from the point of convergence of the Devī's hand, thigh and ankle along her breast to the elbow of the Gaṇa and the back of Śiva's uppermost hand.

d-b = from the Devī's elbow to Śiva's outermost hand holding the elephant skin.

A′-F′ = on the right side, from the front of the sixth Mātṛkā to the arm of the squatting Yogin along the drapery on Śiva's thigh and from his first to his uppermost right hand. Śiva's right flank lies parallel between this line and the central diameter.

a′-e′ = axis of the fourth Mātṛkā's body and directing the slant of Śiva's second upper forearm.

Śiva's raised shin is not conform to this space-direction, which governs all the rest. It is in accordance with the diameter F-F′, which otherwise does not enter into the scheme of this composition. This gives the knee a sharper angle than if it were to follow the space-direction of f′-f. Standing out, moreover, as an isolated form, the energy of its movement is enhanced.

B′-E′ = from the second Mātṛkā up along the front of the elephant's leg and head to the hand with the ḍamaru.

The elephant also does not exactly conform to this inclination, but deviates in the opposite sense. Instead of overstressing the slant, it falls short of it and tends towards the vertical, thus expressing the drooping intertia of a dead body.

d′-b′ = is the inner axis of the elephant's figure.
D′-C′ = the line of his front-leg.

This essential space-direction is balanced by complementary trends distributed in smaller forms all over the panel, which are governed by the diameter a-a′.

a-a′ = along the left side of Śiva's head and flank, along the hanging drapery and as dividing line between Bhṛṅgī and the Yogin, it marks the backward tilt of Śiva's upper body.
A-B′ = along the right side of Śiva's head and the inner limit of his right fist, the outer limit of his ankle-bells down between the second and third Mātṛkā, giving the direction of their bodies. Śiva's head is placed exactly between these two last lines.
f′-b′ = forms the axis of the upper right Gaṇa and of the first Mātṛkā. Śiva's right upper arm and the right side of his jaṭāmaṇḍala lie in the middle between this and the previous line. Stemmed against the upward thrust of his entire body, they form an effective prop to its heavy sway. Although at a certain distance, the first three Mātṛkās, who follow this same slant, give them a basic support.
F′-C′ = marks the outline of Śiva's uppermost forearm, and through the wristlet of the lowest arm runs down to the edge of the pilaster.
e′-c′ = marks the line of the triśūla and the root of the elephant's ear.
B-A′ = marks the flank and shin of the left side Gaṇa, the shin of Bhṛṅgī and the limit of the Mātṛkā-group.
b-f = marks the outer limit of Śiva's uppermost hand, the wrists of his two lowest hands, and the forward slant of the Yogin's body.
C-F = descending from the root of the elephant's tail, it marks the outer limit of Śiva's second hand, the axis of the Devī's head, the slant of her right forearm and ends at the back-edge of her throne.
c-e = along the left flank of the Devī to the front-edges of her throne. Her raised shin lies along the directing circle.

Second in importance in this composition is the transversal movement governed by the diameter d-d′ and featured essentially in the outspread arms of Śiva. The overall inclination of these arms stands at an angle of 60 degrees to the principal upward movement, but stands at right angles to the complementary tilt of Śiva's upper body.

d-d′ = through the arm of the Devī and along Śiva's extended arm, crossing Śiva's hips in their widest extension, touching his right fist and running out between his two lower right arms. The Devī's and Śiva's right arms cover the left side of the panel in an unbroken line. This line marks another division of the panel in a lower and an upper half, along the overall direction of the extended arms.
D-E′ = marks the broadest extension of Śiva's outspread arms, from the kapāla on the left to the ḍamaru on the right side. It runs along both the second upper arms, right and left, that support the elephant skin.

c-e′ = marks the slant of Śiva's shoulders and the upper level of all these transversal movements.

C-F′ = marks the limit of Śiva's first right and second left hand, the upper limit of the right Gaṇa, the line of the snake encircling Śiva's head and the line dividing the elbows of the left Gaṇa from his knee. Śiva's face remains enclosed within a rectangle formed by four oblique chords standing at right angles.

b-f′ = connects the top of the jaṭāmaṇḍala with the head of the Gaṇa and the uppermost left hand.

This space-direction that dominates the entire upper half of the panel is less conspicuous, although not absent, in the lower half.

E-D′ = from the ankle of the Devī along the loop of drapery between Śiva's legs, the lower outline of his right thigh to his knee and the ear of the elephant. The central form-complex of Śiva's hips and thigh give a powerful support to the transversal sway of the arms.

e-c′ = from the front angle of the Devī's throne through the rising line from the small Gaṇa on the ground to the group of Bhṛṅgī and his companions, the ankle of Śiva and the Gaṇa above his foot to the neck of the elephant.

F-C′ = line rising from the seat of the Gaṇa near the throne to the two Gaṇas below and by the side of Śiva's raised foot.

This powerful transversal sway incorporated mainly in Śiva's arms and right thigh is also balanced by smaller forms governed by the complementary diameter c-c′ and its parallels. This movement is at right angles to the upward surge of Śiva's body. For instance:

c-c′ = across Śiva's left elbows, along his first left forearm, his waistband and raised thigh.

C-D′ = gives the direction of the uppermost left arm and of the right forearm holding the triśūla.

B-E′ = from the upper limit of the left side Gaṇa along the necklace of the right side one to Śiva's hand with the ḍamaru.

a-e′ = marks the upper limit of the jaṭāmaṇḍala and the axis of the two upper right bent hands of Śiva.

D-C′ = descends from the head of the Devī along the lowest loop of the drapery between Śiva's legs to the chestline of the Gaṇa by the side of his foot.

d-b′ = from the Devī's elbow along the line of her breast, along Bhṛṅgī's daṇḍa-hasta and Śiva's raised foot down to the first Matṛkā's shoulder.

E-B′ = from the Devī's ankle across the head of the small Gaṇa and Bhṛṅgī's knee down to the legs of the first two Matṛkās.

Within the system of oblique lines described so far, two intersecting squares can be traced that constitute its essential frame-work. They touch the directing circle with all their points and therefore have the same size as the square described in the Space-division. One is E′B E B′, and the other F′-C-F-C′, the first being based on the essential diameter f-f′ and the second on the other essential diameter d-d′. In their interplay the movement pattern of the composition is summed up.

But besides these four oblique diameters that have been considered so far, some of the other diameters also come into play to mark the direction of one or the other form-element not covered by the basic scheme. For instance: (See Plate XXIIIa).

B-B′ = marks the outline of Śiva's right flank and of the drapery around the root of his right thigh.
b-b′ = the diagonal slant of the left uppermost forearm.
E′-E = the direction of the forearm with the ḍamaru.
e-e′ = the other diagonal, the forshortened side of the Devī's throne.

Since almost all diameters participate to a larger or lesser extent in the lay-out of the composition, a radial disposition of form-elements also arises in certain parts. The madhya-bindu is marked by the letter O.

B′-O-f = encompasses the entire group between Śiva's legs.
a′-O-f = encompasses the figure of Bhṛṅgī alone.
e-O-D = holds the figure of the Devī.
d-O-c = holds the two lowest left arms of Śiva.
c-O-b = holds the two upper left arms of Śiva.
b-O-a = holds the upper left Gaṇa.
a-O-f′ = holds the head of Śiva.
A′-O-b′ = holds the group of the Mātṛkās.
b′-O-D′ = holds the elephant's front.

In the upper part the radial disposition is emphasized for the eye by the fact that Śiva's outspread arms are enclosed within the circular line of the elephant hide, which is roughly coinciding with the directing circle. This circular enclosure collects and rounds up the centrifugal movements thrown out by Śiva's arms.

INTEGRATION AND INTERPRETATION

The Gajasaṁhāramūrti, which is facing the Jñāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti under the inner porch of the Kailāsanātha Temple, is in character and all essential features its exact opposite. While the Dakṣiṇāmūrti is an image of indrawn power, self-centred quiescence and of silent, blissful serenity, the Saṁhāramūrti is palpitating with action. It is loaded with an explosive energy radiating from the centre outwards. The movement in the first image is centripetal, while in the second it is centrifugal, and the juxtaposition of these two images may not be quite accidental.

In the Dakṣiṇāmūrti flows of energy are drawn in from above and from all quarters to subside, like rivers in the ocean, in a centre of repose, the Prāṇa of Śiva. In the Saṁhāramūrti energy is welling up from below, from the ground of all existence, like a hot spring from the earth. It is ascending through Śiva's body, growing and expanding in his chest, from where it breaks forth in all directions of space.

The ascending movement in the lower half of the panel is actually threefold, as it works not only through Śiva's left leg, but also through his raised right leg and through the figure of the Devī. The expanding movement in the upper half radiates through Śiva's arms and his fiery jaṭāmaṇḍala. It fills the upper space from end to end, pushing apart the cover of the elephant skin, the cover of darkness, whose weight and resistence is giving a sharp backward bend to Śiva's uppermost hands. The elephant hide, besides being a symbol and an important feature of the story, has an obvious formal function, as it restrains and collects the energy projected outwards by the arms of Śiva. Semicircular in its upper part, it is prolonged vertically in the lower parts by the hanging head and legs of the elephant on the right side and his hind legs on the left. Taken together with the figure of the Devī and the throne, the elephant skin forms a complete arch, an architectural frame-work around the central figure.

The oblique thrust of Śiva's body cuts across this arch from bottom to top. It runs in a straight line from his left foot to his right shoulder, and from there bends into the complementary slant in the upper part of the chest and in the head. The flow of energy that surges from the ground upwards through Śiva's left leg is projected outwards also through the right thigh. Standing at a wide angle of 105 degrees to the left leg, it establishes a balance at this first level, from where the movement gathers new momentum to rise higher and higher, into the chest and head, and to flow out into the expanding arms. The two arms that press their clenched fists on hip and thigh, collect and accumulate the explosive force that fills the body and that is finally released in the thrust of the other arms.

The two phases of Śiva's movements are different in character. The upward movements of his legs are straight and angular, while the expanding movements of the chest and arms are more rounded and resilient. The fighting temper is here joined to the exultation of victory. The fighting mood is shown, as Śiva is tearing through space, between the Devī of Light and the Demon of Darkness, between Vidyā and Avidyā, dividing them forever. Yet the fight is over. Head and feet of the elephant are drooping and lifeless, the Mātṛkās sit as if exhausted. The Devī is again secure on her throne, and in the small figures, in Bhṛṇgī, dancing gleefully, in the acclaiming Gaṇas and Yogins, the joy of victory begins to break forth. Then, in the upper parts, the expressions of joy and exultation are released in full. Śiva's arms are spread out in the ecstasy of victory, his face is swelled and his eyes are dilated in wrathful triumphant frenzy, the jatāmaṇḍala around his head quivers like a halo of flames. Both the aspects, the struggle of the God with the powers of Darkness and his final triumph over them are brought into a forceful synthesis.

Śiva's straightlined upward movement works like a two-edged sword, cleaving the cover of tamas and avidyā overlaying the earth, embodied in the background of the elephant-skin. It resembles a flash of lightning darting across a black sky, rending the veil of darkness, and making manifest the presence of light at the centre of all things.

Śiva's light, as it emerges from the nether world of strife and conflict, becomes ever more radiant, as it overcomes the powers of obscuration, until in his head it manifests in its full glory. Like the sun itself, the head of Śiva, encircled by the enormous jaṭāmaṇḍala, breaks forth from the middle of dark clouds in a halo of flames. The fiery irradiation extends into the outspread arms, which project the light into all directions of space.They carry the light and at the same time take the universe into their embrace.

Śiva's raised leg, in its angular thrust, asserts his victory and puts the final seal upon it. It is as if he were mounting on a throne, on which to establish his lordship. Cinmayā Devī is already seated on that throne, which she shares with him. She represents the very same Light of pure Consciousness that blazes forth from Śiva's corruscated face. When her power and overlordship was threatened by the forces of darkness, Śiva, after defeating the fiend who had tried to take possession of her, reestablished her on the throne of Light. He is touching her cheek and by this gesture he seals their indissoluble bond and oneness. It was for the sake of this union that war had been waged, and if during the fight the Devī went forth in her terrific aspect as Yogeśvarī, she is now drawn back into Śiva as Cinmayā Devī, and her light shines again at the centre of the Universe. The other Śaktis, the Saptamātṛkās, having absorbed in themselves the seven aspects of avidyā, namely kāma, krōdha, lōbha, mada, moha, mātsarya, asūyā (lust, anger, greed, pride, delusion, jealousy, envy) have neutralized these destructive powers. Order and

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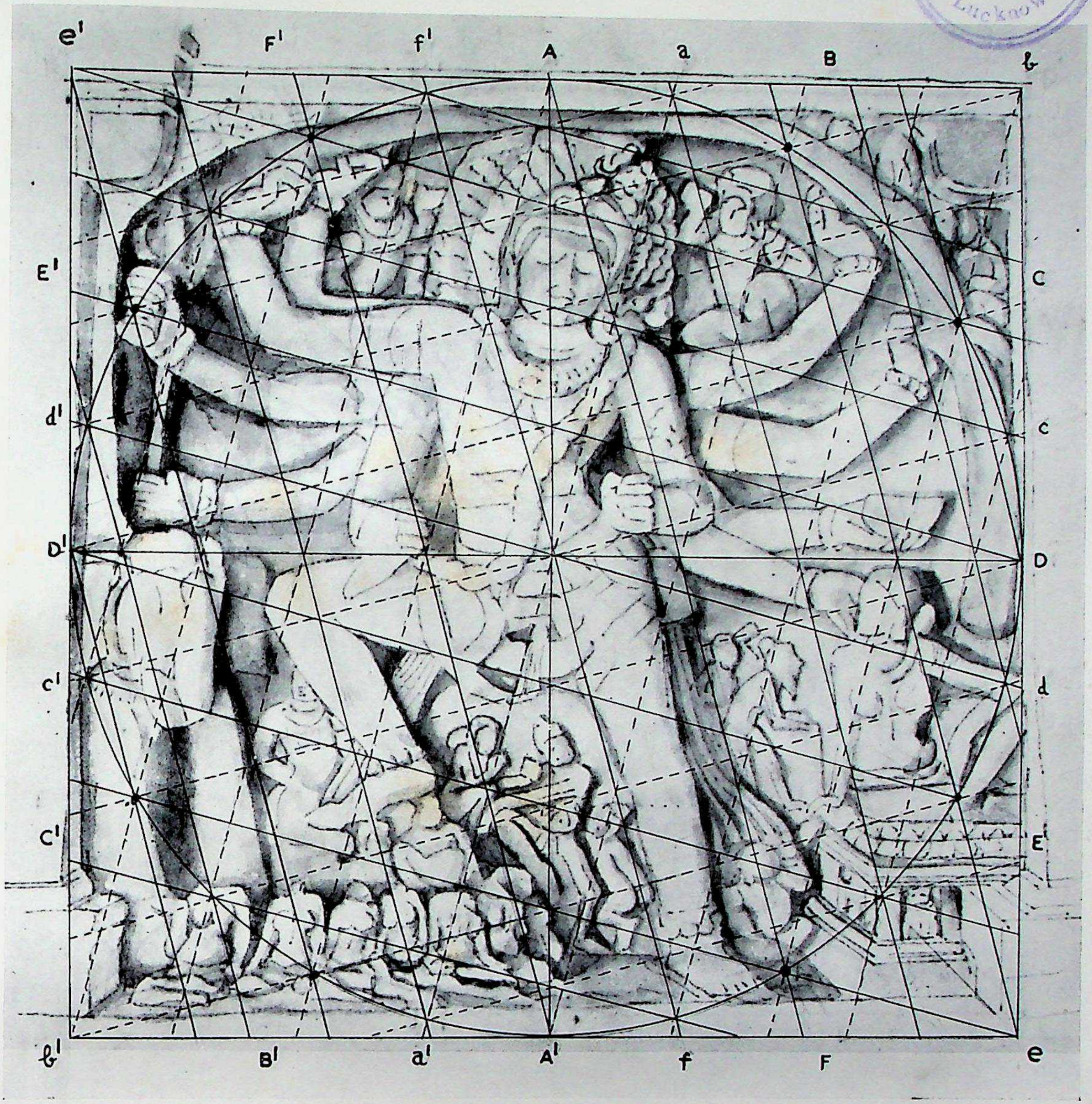
PLATE XXIII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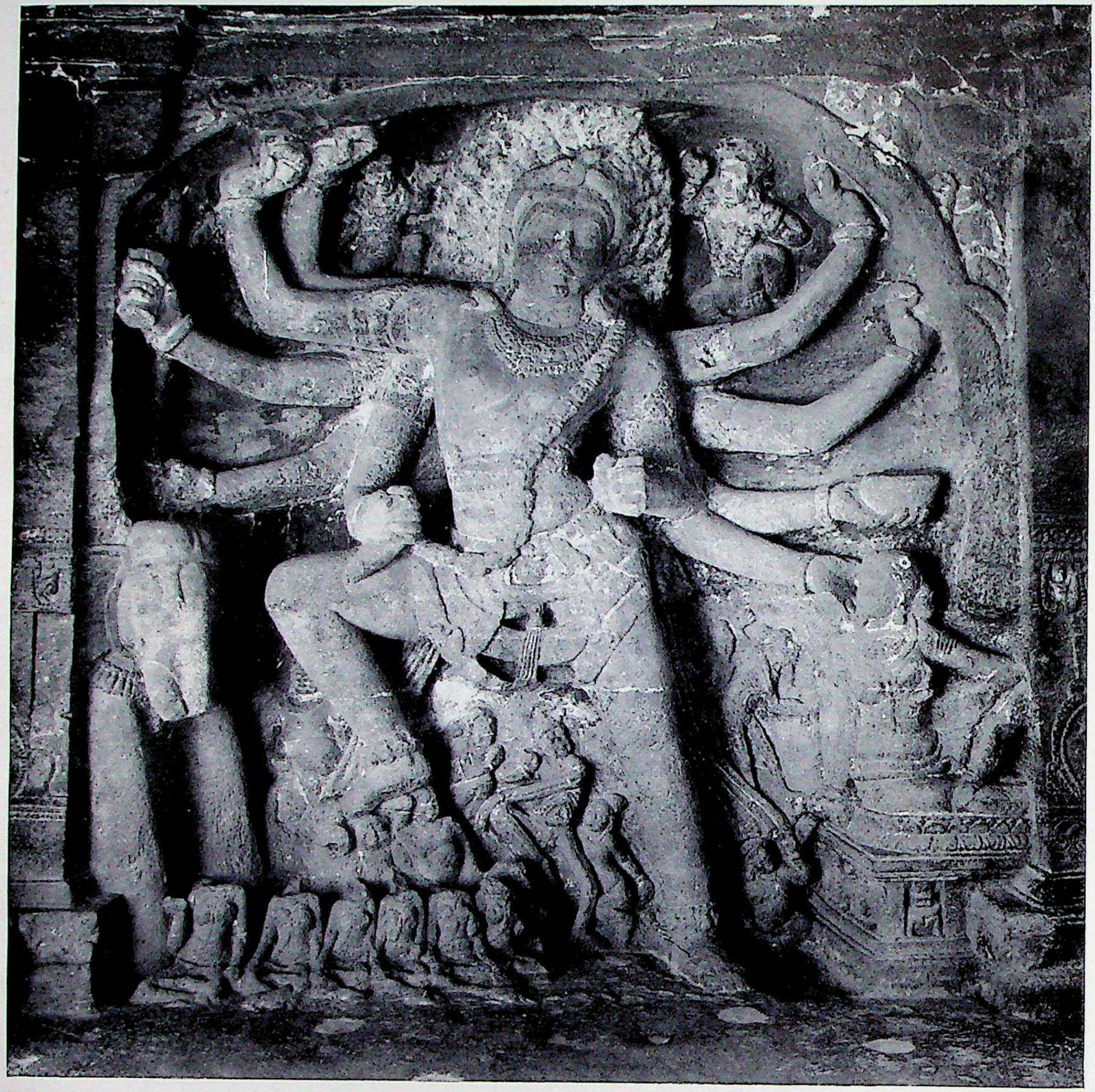
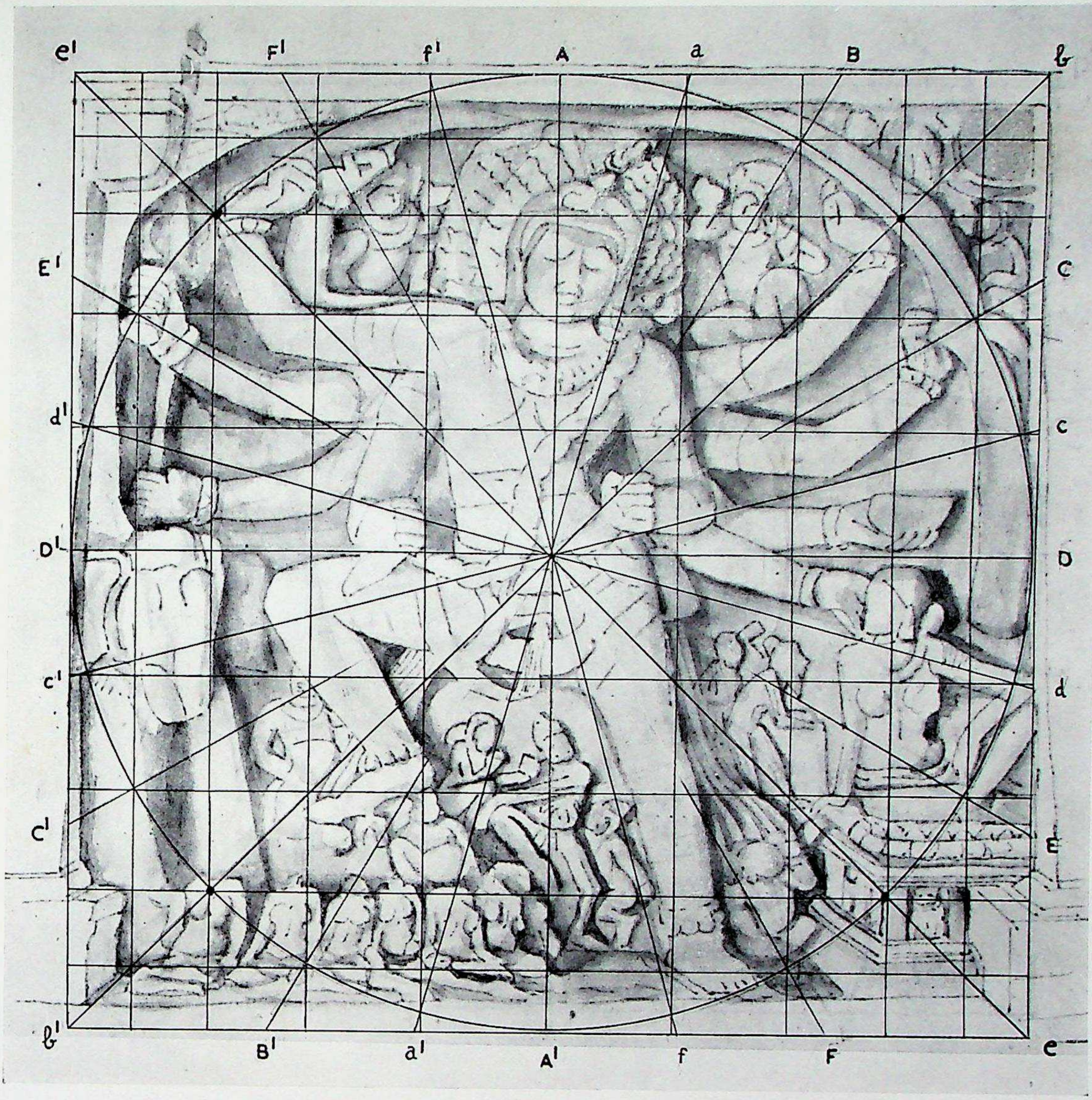
b. TIME DIVISION



GAJASAṀHĀRAMŪRTI, ELŪRĀ, KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE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a. SPACE DIVISION

balance are re-established, and the Devī, in quiescence and repose, contentedly and serenely watches her Lord.

The two images, of Dakṣiṇāmūrti and of Gajasaṁhāramūrti, which are facing each other, and which, by similarity of style, might have been carved by the same hand, seem thus to possess corresponding and complementary meanings. If the Dakṣiṇāmūrti stands for the Jñāna-mārga, the path of concentration and contemplation, the Gajasaṁhāramūrti most probably stands for the Karma-mārga, the path of action and sacrifice. The first path means complete surrender to and identification with a higher Will. The flow of vidyā then descends from above as a divine grace and blissfully permeates the entire being. The second path means an active struggle against darkness and tāmasic obstruction, by which the forces of light and truth are awakened in the inner Self. Striving to attain ever higher levels of Consciousness this inner Self finally reaches union with the Supreme.

It might be relevant to note in this respect, that the Dakṣiṇāmūrti image of Śiva is without Śakti, and is therefore niṣkriya (without action), and that the Saṁhāramūrti is with his Śakti and therefore sakriya (with action).

CHAPTER TWENTY

ANDHAKĀSURA VADHAM

ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV, 8TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XXIV

This image refers to the same story as the Gajasaṃhāramūrti described before, to the fight between Śiva and Andhakāsura (see page 209). But while Śiva is shown there after his final triumph over the Asura, he is represented here at the culminating moment of the fight, when, having pierced the Asura with his triśula, the latter, defeated and deprived of his power, implores Śiva's mercy. Śiva holds the elephant skin aloft, with its head hanging down on the left side and the tail and hind legs on the right.

The Śakti Kālī or Yogeśvarī, who in the other image has come to rest together with the other Mātṛkās, is here in full action. Fierce and emaciated, she drags her body on the ground, holding the sacrificial knife in one hand, and raising with the other a kapāla towards Andhakāsura to collect the blood falling from his wounds. But, on the left side, seated against the projecting side-wall and at right angles to the panel, she is also anticipated in her benign and peaceful aspect, which she will resume after Śiva's victory and the surrender of the Andhakāsura. In her aspect of Cinmayā-Devī, she sits on a lotus throne with her left foot resting on a cluster of lotuses.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XXIVa

The panel is a square, slightly broader than high. The directing circle is based on the width of the panel, measured on the front edges of the pilasters. It is divided by six principal and six subsidiary diameters.

Verticals

Madhya-sūtra = in the exact middle between the two wall-pilasters, falls from Śiva's uppermost left hand along the vertical part of his skull-garland and along the flank of the small Gaṇa below his foot to the knee of Kālī, which marks the centre in the lower part of the panel.

f′-a′ = along the right side of Śiva's face and his right flank down to Kālī's ankle. Śiva's trunk and face are contained in the first vertical space-division between this line and the madhya-sūtra, which also holds Kālī's hand with the knife, her extended shin and the legs of the Gaṇa. Śiva's body is in an excentric position with respect to the relief-field.

F′-B′ = from the back of Śiva's mukuṭa across his arms thrown backward, to his hand on the triśūla and the front of his right foot.

e′-b′ = from the back of Śiva's upper right hand holding the elephant-skin, the front of his hand holding the ḍamaru to the end of the triśula and down along the scarf to the back of his foot.

E′-C′ = along the wall pilaster, which is the outer limit of the panel. These last two space-divisions contain the fan of Śiva's right forearms, the lower part of his right leg and the scarf falling along its side, as also the hind leg and tail of the elephant (not visible in the photo).

a-f = on the left side, from the front of Andhakāsura through the upper hand holding the triśula to the raised knee of Śiva, dividing it from Kālī's jaṭā, to his foot and the hip of Kālī.

In the space-division between this line and the madhya-sūtra forms are zig-zagging forward and backward, from Śiva's uppermost hand holding the elephant-skin to his elbow, from there back through the hands holding the triśula and showing tarjanī-hasta to the trunk, from there out again through the thigh to the knee and back to the heel, and forward again to the point of the foot, and back through the body of the Gaṇa. This zig-zag line, throwing forward so many pointed angular forms, is giving an aggressive front to Śiva's figure.

B-F = across the waist of Andhakāsura and down through the middle of Kālī's body. This space-division holds the front part of Andhakāsura, Śiva's arm with the kapāla and the right half of Kālī's trunk and head.

b-e = from Kālī's kapāla down along her left side and the front of the small Devī, her seat and footstool.

C-E = along the erect back of the small Devī and along her lowered leg to the front of the pilaster base. These two space-divisions contain the forms of Kālī's left side, with her raised arm, the small Devī and the head of the elephant. The latter stand at right angles to the relief-field, and the left leg and arm of the Devī and the rolled up trunk of the elephant reach somewhat beyond into the outermost space-division.

Horizontals

The horizontal space-divisions provide for a clear organization of levels, marked by transversal movements. In the lower half the horizontal chords run as axes through all horizontal form-elements. In the upper half the horizontal chords mark the limits of horizontal form-complexes rather than their axes. On the whole the horizontal space-organization is very clearly marked, but the horizontals are here also dynamic lines of stress.

Madhya-prastha = from Śiva's right hand holding the triśula through the horizontal extension of his thigh, from the right hip to the left knee, and across the head of Kālī to the shoulders of Pārvatī.

c′-d = marks the lower level of the bow on Śiva's hip, of his skull garland, then Kālī's extended arm and the upper level of Pārvatī's legs. The space-division between the two lines is full with forms running across: the right thigh of Śiva and the bow behind it, the loop of the skull-garland, the raised shank, the face and arm of Kālī and the torso of Pārvatī, all following closely one another.

C′-E = marks the axis of Kālī's knife and passes below Śiva's foot and below the seat of Pārvatī. In this space-division the forms running across are more widely spaced and are alternating with horizontal forms.

b′-e = through Śiva's right ankle and Kālī's legs extending almost across the entire panel, it also marks the level of the ground.

B′-F = marks the front-line of the panel's base. These last two space-divisions are filled with long-stretched form-elements, except at the two ends, where Śiva's right leg and Pārvatī's footstool stand upright across.

d′-c = in the upper half, divides Śiva's right lower forearms from the upper ones, it marks the wrist of his tarjanī-hasta and the upper level of the Devī's crown.

E′-C = marks the upper level of Śiva's right upper arms, the dividing line between his neck and his face, the wrists of his hands holding triśula and kapāla and the upper limit of his hand with the ḍamaru and of Kālī's hand with the kapāla.

e′-b = marks the lower limit of the brackets, the division between Śiva's face and mukuṭa, his upper elbow and the axis of Andhakāsura's body.

F′-B = marks the upper limit of the panel with Śiva's mukuṭa, his uppermost hand and the Andhakāsura's head.

In this panel forms are not evenly distributed, but there is throughout a lively alternation of form-aggregates and of empty spaces, of stresses and of voids, which assures the composition a strong articulation of movement and a great variety of form-figurations. Horizontal sequences of forms alternate with others where an upward movement predominates: such horizontal sequences are between E′-C and d′-c, then again between D′-D and and c′-d, and again between C′-E and B′-F; the uppermost chiefly on the right side of the panel, the middle one across the entire panel, and the lowest more to the left. In these the rhythmic intention of the composition becomes clear. In the absence of any stabilizing vertical this studied distribution of long horizontal form-aggregates collecting the movements into distinct levels one above the other gives firmness to the whole structure. Although these horizontals incorporate a considerable expanding power, their clear articulation into distinct levels gives a frame-work and inner balance to the composition.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXIVb

Essential diameters: B′-B, C′-C, a-a′

In this composition the upward movement of the two main figures is determined by two different diameters, Śiva mainly following the diameter B′-B and Kālī following the diameter a′-a. The inclination of Śiva's body is therefore stronger by 15 degress than that of Kālī. It is also stronger by 15 degrees than that of the Gajasaṁhāramūrti described before, and has therefore a greater sway and violence of movement, giving support to the assumption that here the fight is described and there, the victory after the fight.

B′-B = from the point of Kālī's foot along the upward line of the skull-garland and Śiva's two upper hands, marking their outer limit, to the armline of Andhakāsura. This line covers an upward sequence of forms running parallel to Śiva's left flank.

b′-a = from the right ankle as axis through the entire length of Śiva's body, from the right leg to his left shoulder and finally through the wrist of his uppermost hand supporting the elephant skin.

Although Śiva's figure is swaying out to the right and the left of this line, its upward thrust is exactly conform to it. The fact that the axis of Śiva's body does not lie on the central diameter, but on its next parallel chord gives it an excentric position which adds momentum to its movement.

C′-A = marks the direction of the scarf hanging from Śiva's hip and of his forearm holding the triśula. The first is inside, the second outside the line, which further up runs along the garland on Śiva's shoulder and divides his face from his mukuṭa.

c′-f′ = from the wrist of the hand holding the sword across the two upper elbows to the jaṭāmukuṭa.

D′-F′ = from the hand with the sword through the two upper hands to the edge of the bracket.

a′-b = on the left side, along the Gaṇa's body and Śiva's left shin up to the tip of his hand with the kapāla. This sequence enforces the upward thrust by another parallel.

When we come to the movement of Kālī, the slant becomes somewhat straightened up because it conforms to the diameter a′-a instead of the diameter B′-B. A similar device was found in the image of the Naṭarāja at Bādāmī, where the movement also straightened up in the left lower part of the panel.

f-b = second outer chord of the diameter a′-a runs through Kālī's body inside her right flank and through her mouth and eye to her kapāla.

F-C = along her left flank and her raised left arm to the inside corner of the bracket. It determines the slant of her trunk and arm. It also marks the front line of the Devī, from her knee to her head.

e-c and E-D = the slant of the Devī's leg and of her footstool.

All these parallels are responsible for the dominating aspect of this composition, the violent forward and upward drive of all form-elements. This drive is further emphasized and supported by a forward displacement along the diameter C′-C.

C′-C = from Śiva's scarf through both his legs up to Kālī's kapāla. This diameter marks the wide gap which divides the panel into two halves, of which the upper left is Śiva's and the lower right is Kālī's.

c′-b = from Śiva's lower right hand along the shaft of the triśūla across his body to the tarjanī-hasta, the wrist of the hand holding the triśula and the hand with the kapāla. While three hands follow this line in a straight sequence, the triśūla is deflected upwards with the fourth.

D′-B = from the hand holding the sword, as axis through the forearm and the right upper arm which holds the triśūla, between Śiva's head and neck and up to the shoulder of Andhakāsura along the line of the uppermost left arm.

This unbroken line of arms, crossing the panel from end to end, together with the left lower arms and the line of the triśūla mediating between the two, constitutes one single form-complex incorporating the strongest accents in this forward drive.

d′-a = from the right hand with the ḍamaru across the base of Śiva's mukuṭa to the left hand upholding the elephant skin, connecting them in an upward sequence.

E′-A = from the uppermost right hand to the crescent on the mukuṭa, in a parallel ascent.

b′-c = below the centre, from Śiva's right ankle, along Kālī's forearm with the knife, through the sockets of her eyes to her left elbow, showing also here an upward sequence in the same direction.

B′-D = from Kālī's ankle through the body of the Gaṇa to the point of Śiva's left foot and thence across Kālī's chest to the breast of the Devī.

a′-d = through the length of Kālī's thigh up to the Devī's knee. The Devī's right thigh lies in the same direction.

A′-E = through the foot of Kālī to the foot of the Devī. Kālī's movements in this direction are in accordance with those of Śiva.

It is rather curious to observe, how some of these last described lines, which determine Kālī's figure and movement, connect the parts of her body with the same parts in the body of the Devī, her alter ego.

This movement swaying across the panel from right to left joins forces with the upward movement along B′-B. Both, however, are checked and balanced by the complementary of B′-B only, which is F′-F. This diameter cuts the transversal drive at right angles, but the upward drive at an angle of 60 degrees only.

F′-F = marks the right outline of Śiva's mukuṭa, and after crossing his body, touches the point of his left foot and runs along the drapery on Kālī's hip.
e′-f = marks the slant of Śiva's uppermost right forearm, of the garland on his arm, and after crossing his hip marks the sharp bend of Kālī's hand holding the knife.
E′-A′ = from the outer side of the hand with the ḍamaru to the outer side of the hand on the triśūla and through the upturned point of Kālī's knife. The outer part of the skull-garland runs between these last two lines in their direction.
d′-a′ = delimits the outer end of the hand holding the sword, of the staff of the triśūla and of the point of Kālī's foot.
D′-B′ = marks the direction of Śiva's foot.

To the left of the centre:

f′-e = marks the left side of Śiva's head and mukuṭa, then the slant of the thumb of the tarjanī-hasta and the axis of its arm, the limit of Śiva's left knee, the slant of Kālī's head along her ear and finally the outline of the Devī's throne, although at a little distance.

Śiva's head is enclosed between two parallel lines, it is as a matter of fact, enclosed within an oblique rectangle, exactly as in the previous image of the Gajasaṁhāramūrti.

A-E = along Śiva's left upper arm holding the triśula and along the left side of Kālī's head, which thus is enclosed between two parallels like Śiva's head, then to the ankles of the Devī.
a-d = through head and chest of Andhakāsura, along Śiva's kapāla, along Kālī's raised forearm and the upper left arm of the Devī.
B-D = from the back of Andhakāsura touching the edge of the bracket, through Kālī's fingers, along the head of the elephant to the crown of the Devī.

These movements balance and qualify the upward thrust, and powerfully articulate and check the transversal extension. This should not be understood as a factor diminishing the power of the movement, but rather as a factor increasing it by holding together its energy, and by collecting and concentrating its outgoing forces.

Integration and Interpretation

We said in the beginning that in the Gajasaṁhāramūrti emphasis is laid upon the final triumph of light over the darkness of Avidyā (Nescience), but that in this image it is upon the struggle itself. This is the reason why Kālī, who in the other image has resumed her benign Cit-rūpa, is here very prominent in her Saṁhāra-rūpa. Andhakāsura is the impersonation of tāmasic darkness, of spiritual blindness, which the divine powers are about to destroy. Here Andhakāsura is very small but the spreading of Avidyā is pictorially represented, as in the previous image, by Nīla's, the elephant-demon's skin, which Śiva is wielding over his head, and which covers the entire background of the composition like a dark cloud.[1] The elephant is a symbol of the tāmasic tendency, while the lion is a symbol of the solar, the sāttvic principle. In the Varāha Purāṇa it is said that Śiva-Vīrabhadra took the form of a lion to kill the Gajāsura, whose name was Nīla (Black). A lion standing over a vanquished elephant frequently found on the walls of temples or as pillar-bases, or on temple-śikharas, refers to the same symbolism.

The panel is divided obliquely into a right upper and a left lower half. While the figure of Śiva fills the upper half, the figure of Kālī occupies the lower. Both figures describe separate and independant curves, converging towards Andhakāsura in the uppermost left corner.

Śiva's fighting energy is expressed in the oblique thrust of his body, crossing the entire panel, from the lowest right corner, where his foot is planted on the ground, to the uppermost left corner within the bracket, where he has transfixed the Asura with his triśūla, and with the other hand is collecting the blood falling from his wounds. It is also expressed in the angular shapes that his body is throwing out on all sides: the sharp point of his forward jutting knee, the sharp bends of his left arms at the shoulder and at the elbows, the bend of the wrists of all his right arms. There is aggressive tension in every limb. But the greatest stress lies in the middle, at the point covered by the head of the snake on the madhyaprastha, where the oblique thrust of his right leg and torso and the horizontal of his raised leg pull away from one another in opposite directions. This point of intersection of two essential directions is not a point of concentration of gravitational forces, but a point of disruption, from where outgoing forces are projected on all sides across the entire panel. This point of disruption does not lie at the centre of the panel, but at the centre of Śiva's form, at his Mūlādhāra-cakra (Earth-centre). From it originate all the outgoing forces that culminate in the destruction of Andhakāsura, which means in the breaking and shattering of the limiting, obstructive forms of manifestation. The other half of the work, the collecting of the life-substance for future creation is left to Kālī, who is represented even bigger than Śiva. Her circular sway, arching upward from the ground connects the beginning and the end of Śiva's movement, from his right foot to his left hand raised with the kapāla. But the two figures do not touch one another, except at one point in the middle where Kālī's arm passes behind Śiva's leg. They are divided by a long gap running across the entire panel. Emptiness is between them, emptiness is the core of the composition, emptiness is the end of the struggle. Emptiness will remain at the centre, when the movements and forms scattered outwards are collected and folded up into a circular motion along the outer circumference, at the limits of Space. The manifested world is destroyed, not by an outer agency, but from within, by inner explosion, or by inner exhaustion, when the world-substance is used up and has fulfilled all its saṁskāras: "A conflagration, when there is no more combustible matter, returns to the latent condition of Fire (Vahnibhāva)" and "manifold Śakti returns to the condition of Brahmā". (Pañcarātra).

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[1] In the present state of preservation, the lime applied to the ground of the relief makes it appear white instead of dark, which is contrary to the meaning of the image.

This composition is built up of two distinct dynamic motifs: a centrifugal movement in straight and angular lines breaking forth from Śiva's body and projected outward in all directions of space through his arms and legs, and a circular peripheral movement incorporated in the arch of Kālī's figure, and projected from there around the circle through the elephant skin, the Andhakāsura and the peripheral hands of Śiva. This outer circular movement is, however, not closed and does not form a complete, unending revolution like that of a wheel. It is divided into two phases, one running clockwise from Śiva's right foot, along his right hands up to his head. The other running anti-clockwise from Kālī's right foot, along the whole length of her body up to her kapāla, and carried on across the gap through the figure of Andhakāsura and Śiva's uppermost left arm. Both movements from one side and the other converge towards Śiva's head, which stands at their apex and holds them apart. Standing perpendicularly across the circular swirl, his face is distended by a furious grin. The figure of Andhakāsura, although swallowed up into the circular sway thrown up by Kālī, is raised to importance by the fact of being on the point of the triśūla at the apex of the forward thrust of both Kālī's and Śiva's arms, and of being the symmetrical counterpart of Śiva's head in the uppermost part of the panel. Two movements, the upward thrust through the triśūla and the circular sway converge and clash in him. He embodies the object and climax of the drama formally, psychologically and symbolically.

The position of Prakṛtī, of Manifestation is always peripheral with respect to Puruṣa, the supreme Principle. It is the outer projection of the innermost great Power. Hence we may not go far astray by presuming that the figure of Śiva with its centrifugal movements corresponds to Puruṣa, exploding from within the world of forms, the envelopes and limitations of the manifested universe, while the outer ring with Kālī gathering up the scattered and exhausted fragments corresponds to Prakṛti. For going to war against Avidyā, the divine Principle has to clothe itself in Avidyā, and this accounts for all terrifying aspects of divine impersonations. Śakti is here represented in her destructive aspect as the great Time, the devourer of all creation, and therefore as a haggard old witch armed with a sacrificial knife. But outside the circle enclosing the swirl of a dissolving world, the Śakti in her eternal, timeless aspect is seated on her lotus-throne in unruffled serenity and everlasting youth, as it is said: "She who is beginningless (anādirūpā) existed in a subtle state as Caitanya (Consciousness) during the final dissolution" [1].

In the two converging half-circles of Śiva and Kālī, which constitute this image, one may also recognize the symbolism of the World-egg, the Brahmāṇḍa, which split into two, into Essence and Substance, in order to give birth to the manifested world of names and forms. No manifestation is possible, unless these two opposite, yet complementary Principles enclosed in the total Being, as the two halves within the sheath of a grain of gram, separate and go into action. But at the end of a world-cycle, Śakti-Prakṛti, who went forth from the supreme Puruṣa for the sake of creation, returns to be united with him in supreme Bliss and Consciousness. When the cycle closes, she is reabsorbed, till "owing to complete intensity of embrace, the two all-pervading ones, Nārāyaṇa and his Śakti, become as it were a single Principle." [2]

After such complete identification the form of Śakti which in this image is seen seated on the world-lotus, will emerge, floating on the Ocean of Pralaya (final dissolution), radiant in youthful beauty, the promise of a new world. The gap, however, which separates the great Vidyā-Śakti (Kālī) from her Lord is significant of the state of disruption previous to her return to the Sāmarasya of Śiva-Śakti Svarūpa. The more Śakti is separated from Śiva, the more her power becomes destructive, and the more the world is bound to disintegrate. In destruction however she manifests her will to return back to the primordial

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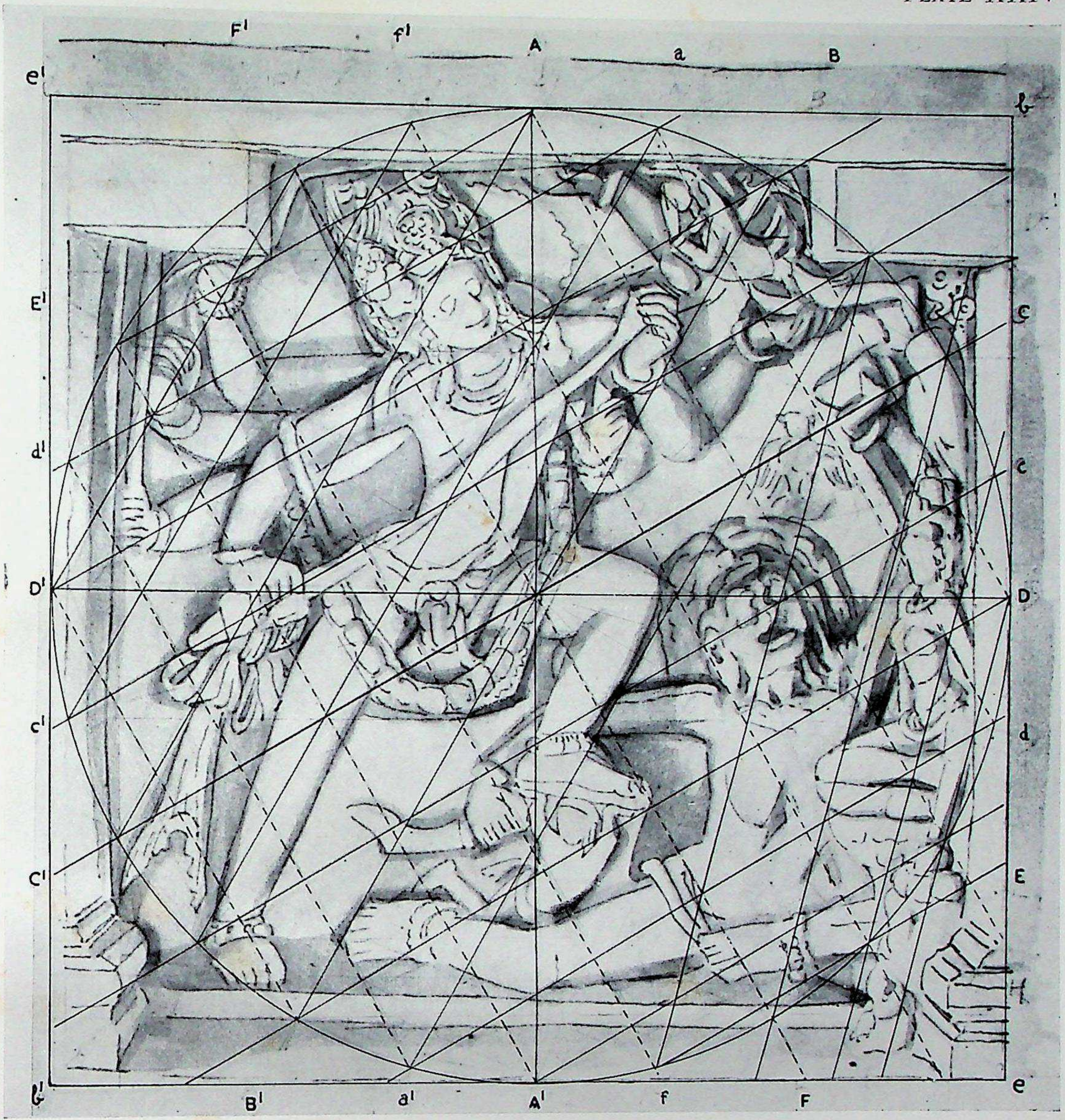
[1] Rāghava Bhaṭṭa, in his commentary on the Sharadā Tilaka, quoted by Sir John Woodroffe in Shakti and Shākta, p. 278

[2] from Pañcarātra Āhirbudhnya Saṃhitā, ibid, p. 279.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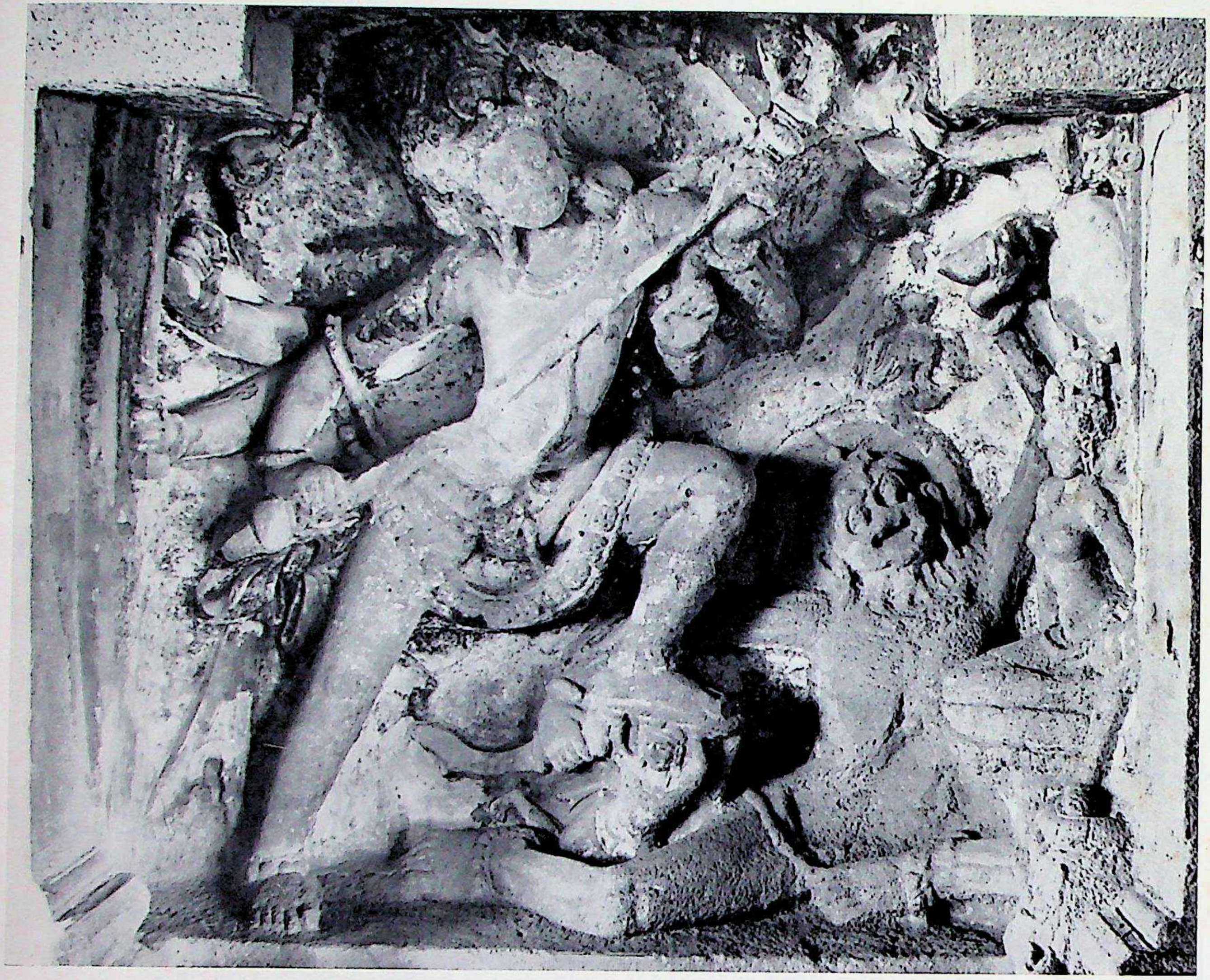
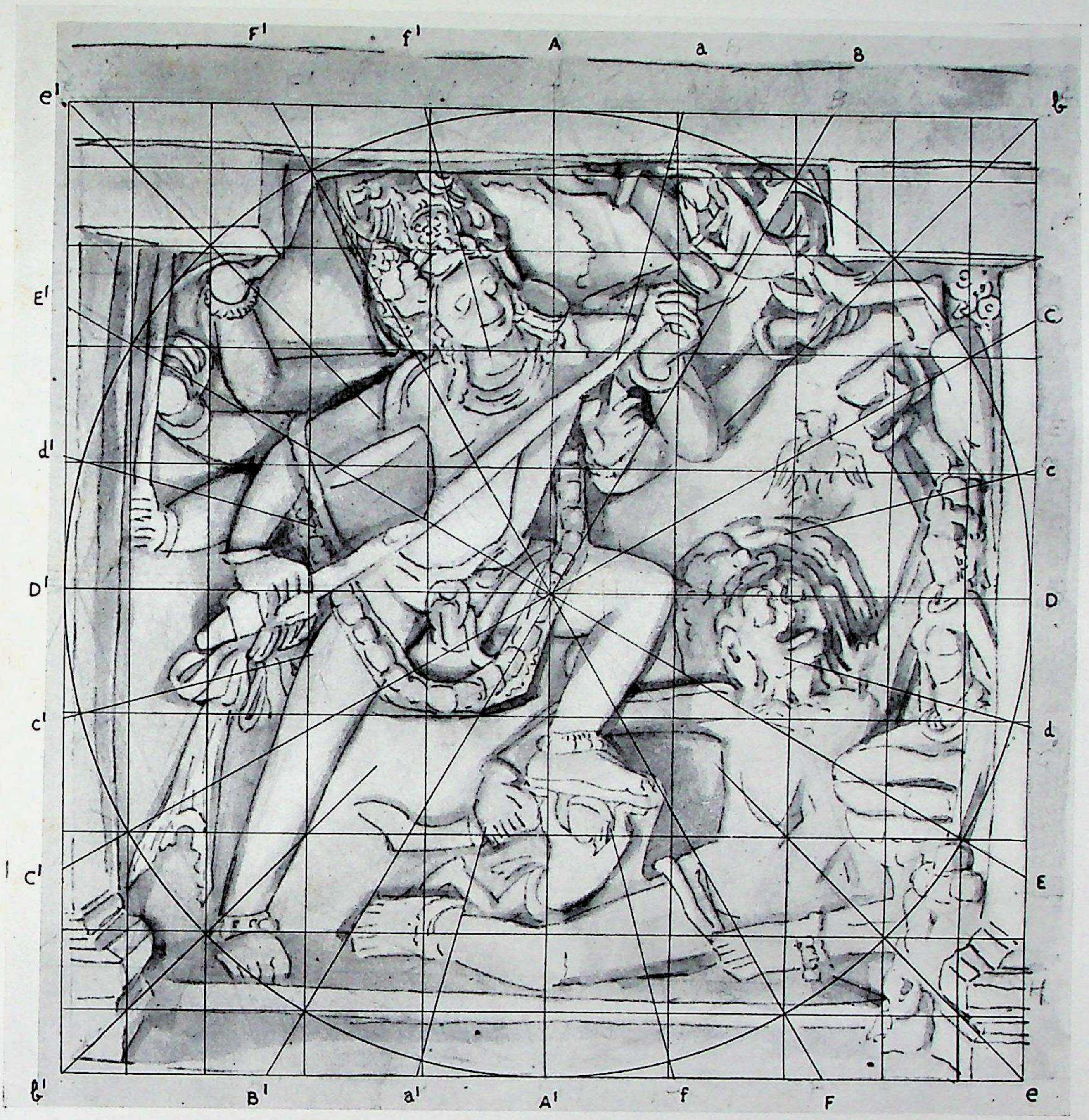
b. TIME DIVISION



ANDHAKĀSURA VADHAM, ELŪRĀ, CAVE XV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a. SPACE DIVISION

unity and harmony within Śiva's embrace. The world of manifestation is the obstacle to this union, and therefore has to be obliterated. The object of destruction is the reintegration of scattered, conflicting individual existences into the one, eternal, supreme harmony of Being. The sum and end of all disorders constitutes the final order. Śiva and Śakti, in destroying the world of manifestation, are drawing towards one another. In this image they are seen converging towards the central gap dividing the circle, across which Andhakāsura (the world) is tranfixed by the point of the triśūla, shedding his blood into the kapālas of Śiva and Śakti. This means that he is giving up his individual ego, his worldly bondage, and through the point of the triśūla enters the heart of Śiva. The triśūla is equivalent to the World-Tree, the Axis of the universe, and it is perhaps not incidental that its shaft is here identified with the thrust of Śiva's body and that it lies across his Prāṇa-cakra, in which resides the breath of all Life.

In this context it may appear quite logical that the Prāṇa-cakra of Śiva does not lie at the centre of the circular composition, but outside in one of the three branches, into which he throws the centrifugal movements of his body. These three branches, formed by his chest and his two legs, may also be taken to represent the three Guṇas, as in the Naṭarāja of Cave XIV. But while there they are spreading in softly rounded movements, showing the initial stages of disruption of their equilibrium, they are here tearing apart at sharp angles, and appear to be at war with one another. The upward pull of Sattvaguṇa and the downward pull of Tamoguṇa create the utmost tension in Śiva's body. If the Prāṇacakra, which is situated in the upward movement of Sattvaguṇa, is out of the compositional centre, it is because what is represented here is the climax of disorder, before the final order is reestablished. Śakti, the expansion of Manifestation is part of the rājasic drive, represented by the horizontals of Śiva's left thigh, of her arm wielding the sacrificial knife and of her legs dragging on the ground. In her destructive mood she is entirely tāmasic, but her aspiration, in the upward arching of her body, is towards Sattva, where resides her real Being, and where Andhakāsura is floating, transfixed upon the point of Śiva's triśūla. Andhakāsura is folding his hands, adoring his Lord, his Father. By giving up his ego-self he becomes a Jīvanmukta, a liberated Being, for whose redemption and liberation this whole conflagration took place. Therefore he is floating like a banner of victory on Śiva's triśūla, at the summit of the whole composition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MAHIṢĀSURAMARDINĪ

MAHĀBALIPURAM, EARLY 7TH CENT. A.D.

PLATE XXV

Durgā mounted on her lion and surrounded by a host of fighting Gaṇas is advancing to give battle to Mahiṣāsura (Buffalo-demon) and his warriors. She brandishes her sword in one of her eight hands, with two others she holds her bow and pulls the bow-string back to her ear, while with her remaining hands she carries further weapons and attributes. The Devī is storming forward with her followers, while the Dānava is pushed back by her onrush. He appears to be on the defensive, but he turns his head defiantly towards the Devī and lifts his club to counter the attack. His followers are retreating or falling under the shower of the Devī's arrows. Only the one in the top centre still faces the assault.

SPACE DIVISION OR MEASURE

PLATE XXVa

The proportions of this elongated rectangular panel are found by the addition of two lateral circles. The central circle, whose diameter is equal to the height of the panel, is divided by six diameters. From the points where the first vertical chords meet the madhya-prastha two more circles of equal diameter are drawn. Their circumference determines the outer sides of the panel. The diameters of the central circle only are extended to the ends of the panel.

Verticals

The verticals have to be drawn across the points of intersection of the diameters with both the central and the lateral circles. Moreover two verticals tangent on the inner circle can be added.

Madhya-sūtra = passes between the clashing shields of the two warriors on top between the head of Durgā's lion and the man falling head downward, and along the face of the small Amazon below him.

This line divides the panel into two separate halves. The right half is occupied by the Devī and her hosts, and the left half by the Mahiṣāsura and his followers. The central circle, however, encloses within its circumference both the main figures, the Devī and the Asura, separating them from the groups of followers on either side. The circle follows the outline of this central group, ascending along the Asura's left shin to his club, his crown and the staff of his umbrella, arching over the heads of the two fighting men in the topmost centre, descending through the staff of the Devī's umbrella to the two Gaṇas below her, and finally passing below the fighting Amazon and the foot of the Asura.

F′-B′ = the next right vertical chord is the madhya-sūtra of the right lateral circle and the axis of the Devī's body, continued in the bow of the Gaṇa below her.

In this lateral circle the Devī is the central figure and the other figures form a circular group around her. There even are two circles, an inner circle, along the Devī's right arms, the two Gaṇas below her, the fighting Amazon, the fallen man and the head of the lion, and an outer circle, along her umbrella, the four outer Gaṇas behind her, the right leg and arm of the Asura and the two fighting warriors at the top.

B-F = the next vertical chord to the left is the madhyasūtra of the left lateral circle, which falls from the Asura's horns along his left flank to his left heel.

The Asura is the central figure of this circle and the surrounding figures also close into a circular group around him, the outline running along the three followers on the left side, the umbrella, the fighting warrior at the top, the front of the Devī, the legs of the Amazon and the fallen man below his feet.

The two lines F′-B′ and B-F, which are the madhyasūtras of these lateral circles, are reciprocally tangent on each other's circle. Between them are enclosed the two fighting men at the top, the front of the lion, the falling man and the Amazon, and on the two sides the front of the Devī and the back portions of the Asura.

E′-C′ of the inner circle = runs as axis through the two Gaṇas closest behind the Devī, the one on top with the sword, and the other below with the camara, and down along the back of the Gaṇa with the bow.

C-E of the inner circle = from the edge of the Asura's umbrella to the point of his mukuṭa, as axis through his arm with the club down to the point of his knee.

Behind these two lines are the tangents on the inner circle, which on either side mark a clear division between the outermost figures and the central group of Devī and Asura. Behind the Devī the tangent divides the three inner Gaṇas from the four outer ones, and also marks the limit of the Devī's arms. Behind the Asura it sets apart the three outermost warriors.

E′-C′ of the right lateral circle = descends from the edge of the bracket through the middle of the group of the outermost Gaṇas, running through arm and groin of the Gaṇa with the jewel-box, between the two middle Gaṇas bearing sword and umbrella, and as axis through the lowest one holding sword and shield.

C-E of the left lateral circle = descends from the bracket through the middle of the three warriors, running along the left flank of the first to the right flank of the second and the centre of the last one, forming the axis of the entire group.

Horizontals

The horizontals have equally to be drawn through both the points of intersection of the diameters with the inner and with the outer circles.

Madhya-prastha = passing from the elbow of the outermost Gaṇa, below the lion's back, below his jaw, across the shoulders of the falling man, along the Asura's right forearm and left wrist and across the chest of the fleeing man, ending in the middle of his shield.

Madhya-bindu = at a neutral point between the two contending forces, on the right shoulder of the falling man.

C′-E of the inner circle = runs along the shoulderline of the two Gaṇas standing on the ground, across the Amazon's breasts and the Asura's legs to the shoulders of the fallen man.

E′-C of the inner circle = runs between the two upper and the two lower Gaṇas behind the Devī, along the horizontal of the Devī's outstretched arms, through the waist of the Asura's warrior, the brow of the Asura to the upper rim of the umbrella-bearer's shield.

The most important sections of the composition are held between these last two lines standing at equal distance from the madhya-prastha, and dividing the main figures horizontally from the accessory ones.

E′-C of the outer circles = from the shoulders of the Gaṇa with the jewel-box to the shoulders of the two warriors above the Asura, this line marks the upper limit of the Devī's head-dress and raised arms with their attributes, and of the Asura's right horn and mukuṭa. It also is the lower limit of the brackets.

F′-B of the inner circle = a minor horizontal passing from the head of the outermost Gaṇa on the right to the top of the outermost warrior's head on the left, passing across the heads of the two central warriors.

C′-E of the outer circles = through the groins of the two Gaṇas on the ground to the shoulder of the man lying on the ground and across the hip of the fallen warrior.

B′-F of the inner circle = along the feet and legs of all figures, standing or lying on the ground.

TIME DIVISION OR MOVEMENT

PLATE XXVb

Essential diameters: B′-B ank E′-E

To obtain the Time-division, the central circle is omitted, but all its diameters drawn out to the ends of the panel, have to remain. The two lateral circles, having their centres in the Devī and the Asura respectively are now also sectioned by six diameters. These new diameters double those of the central circle with parallels all across the panel.

B′-B = up between the back of the Amazon and the frontline of the lion, across the falling man and the Asura warrior to the outline of the Asura's umbrella.

A′-b = the parallel diameter through the left circle marks the backward slant of the Asura's body from his outstretched foot to the top of his mukuṭa, continued up to the top of the umbrella-bearer's head-dress.

This is the most prominent feature of the entire panel, both on account of its size as of its unbroken line.

Between B′-B and A′-b lie the parallel slants of the Amazon's body, the arm of the falling man, the Asura's right arm, his head and pointed mukuṭa.

F-C = after crossing the Asura's knee and the small warrior behind, it runs in the channel of shade behind the fleeing man up to the shield of the umbrella-bearer.

e-D = along the slant of the body of the fallen Asura and the front of the fleeing warrior, his body with the sword being encased between this and the previous line. It ends in the middle of the shield on the madhya-prastha.

b′-A = the parallel diameter through the right circle, runs up from behind the back of the arrow-shooting Gaṇa, through the line of shade between the nape of the lion's neck and the Devī, up along her hand holding the noose to the upper centre of the panel.

Between B′-B and b′-A are the forward slants of the arrow-shooting Gaṇa, of the lion's chest and head and the backward slant of the body and shield of the Asura warrior on top.

c′-F′ = from the right arm of the Gaṇa standing on the ground, up along the shield of the next Gaṇa above, and the long line of the staff of the Devī's umbrella.

Forms running parallel with this slant between b′-A and c′-F′ are: the line of the lowest Gaṇa's arms, of the Gaṇa's body with the fly-whisk, of the Devī's hip and her warrior at the top. Beyond this line the mass of Gaṇas behind the Devī is compressed between the staff of the umbrella and the outer circle.

The dominant movement along these parallels is carried across either by the sway of one big figure or form or by a sequence of smaller forms arrayed along its lines of stress, when their longitudinal axis conforms to its space-direction and does not lie across it. A single long form, like the figure of the Asura or the staff of the Devī's umbrella, naturally carry more momentum than a sequence of many small forms, in whose juxtaposition there are inevitable breaks.

The backward slant of the Asura's body is so heavy and powerful that its impact, like a falling tree, throws back also the warriors behind him. This movement is followed up from behind by the parallel line of the staff of the Devī's umbrella, coupled with the bunch of her right arms. Her movement is pressing forward, preceded by the slant of the lion's foreparts and the figure of the fighting Amazon, and reinforced from behind by the weight of the four Gaṇas.

The complementary movements along the diameter F-F′ are subordinate, since they have no long run anywhere, but are scattered in smaller form-elements throughout the composition. They only help to balance and articulate the dominating trend.

F-F′ = direction of the lion's face, of the Devī's arm holding the śaṅkha, and of the downward curve of her umbrella.
A′-e′ = axis of the left thigh of the kneeling Amazon, the right thigh of the Devī and the sword of the uppermost Gaṇa.
B′-d′ = sequence of the three Gaṇas immediately behind and below the Devī.
b′-D′ = front of the Gaṇa with sword and shield in the lower right corner.
e-A = left thigh of the Asura and arm of the small warrior at the top.
B-d = staff of the Asura's umbrella and left arm of the fallen man, stemmed on the ground.
b-D = position of the body of the Asura's umbrella-bearer.

Between these two diameters B′-B and F-F′, crossing one another at the centre, a triangle of 60 degrees opens up towards the top, enclosing the two fighting warriors, placed between the two symmetrical shapes of the umbrellas. Another triangle opens towards the base enclosing the figure of the Amazon and the warrior she has slain.

Between the upper and the lower branches of these diameters two wide angles of 120 degrees open towards either side. The movement of the Devī and her followers is converging and pushing forward into the right hand angle F′-O-B′, (O = madhya-bindu). The retreating movement of the Asura and his warriors is on the contrary opening out and spreading from the left hand angle B-O-F. This means: the movements of the Devī's group are closing to and concentrating their efforts, while the movements of the Asura group are opening out and dispersing themselves.

The next two parallels A′-e′ and A′-b form an inverted triangle along the sides of which the two contending forces are set against one another, the slant through the Amazon's and the Devī's thighs and through the Gaṇa above her countering that of the Asura's body. Also the further parallels B′-E′ and F-C show an obvious complementary symmetry between the slant of the retreating Asuras and the position of the three Gaṇas behind the Devī, with the only difference that the Asuras are outside their respective line, while the Gaṇas are inside.

In this composition representing a vast drama, where many figures, collected into two antagonistic groups, are involved in action, there is another set of lines connecting the figures with one another in a causal sequence. Such lines were noted already in simpler compositions showing the progress of events, the transmission of stresses from one actor of the drama to the next, as from cause to effect.

Here these lines are based on the diameters E′-E and C′-C of the central circle, stretching across the width of the panel in a long downward and an upward slope, and on their parallels. As they cross the lines of stress of the single figures, mostly at right angles, they appear to be stringing them up one behind another on a long connecting thread.

E′-E = is the trajectory of the collective forward movement of the Devī and her followers.
e′-d and d′-e = are the parallel diameters of the two lateral circles.

Between these two parallels, that is, from the upper right to the lower left corner of the panel this forward and downward thrust lies in a sequence of forms, standing perpendicularly to its direction, but pressing forward along its lines. They are, from above downwards: the Gaṇa with the jewel-box, the upper Gaṇa with the sword, the staff of the Devī's umbrella, the arms and the torso of the Devī, the lion's head and neck, the falling warrior, the hips and thighs of the Asura and the fallen warrior behind him. Of all these forms, only the Asura's left thigh is running along its movement, which means that it is giving way to it.

A-D = runs from the top of the warrior above the Devī to the shoulder of the warrior above the Asura, across the Asura's forehead to the shoulder of the fleeing warrior.

Between this line and the central strip there is another sequence of forms descending in the same direction: the Devī's umbrella, the two fighting figures between the Devī and the Asura, face, shoulders and club of the Asura, the warrior turning his back and the head of the man fallen to the ground. All forms, except the Devi's umbrella, stand across the trend, although at various angles.

D′-A′ = from the Gaṇa with the sword behind the Devī through the legs and shoulders of the two other Gaṇas down to the foot of the Asura.

Between this line and the central strip is a further sequence descending from right to left: the two Gaṇas with sword and umbrella, the camara-bearer, the body of the lion with the Devi's right leg, the body of the Amazon, the right shin of the Asura and the dead man below his feet. All these forms lie across the movement, with exception of the powerful body of the lion, which moves along the line of stress, as the core assembling all the scattered forces in the forward thrust. The direction that has a negative connotation on the side of the Asura, has a positive connotation on the side of the Devī. In these descending sequences her victorious advance and that of her followers is shown step by step, as well as the resistance of the Asura and his followers giving way under its impact.

The complementary slant lies along the diameter C′-C of the central circle sloping upward from the lower right to the upper left corner of the panel, and this in no way breaks the forward drive from right to left, but rather co-operates with and enforces it. Although most forms stand across the trend also here, there are quite a few that follow it.

C′-C = runs from the thigh of the lowest Gaṇa to the arm of the next, across the chest of the lion and the shoulder of the falling man, obliquely through arm and head of the Asura to the shoulder of the umbrella-bearer.
b′-c = the parallel diameter of the left lateral circle, runs from the thigh of the second Gaṇa through arm and head of the Amazon, the hand of the Asura, along his mace to the shield of the umbrella-bearer.
c′-b = the parallel diameter of the right lateral circle, runs from the shoulder of the outermost Gaṇa up along his arm, through the camara-bearer, through the body and head of the lion, the thigh of the warrior on top, along the Asura's mukuṭa to the crown of his umbrella-bearer.

Between these two outer parallels there is an upward sequence of forms standing across: the Gaṇa with sword and shield, the Gaṇa with the bow, the leg of the Devī, the frontline of the lion, the falling man, and at the end the Asura's umbrella bearer. But running with the trend on the upper lines are: the shoulders and arms of both the Gaṇas on the ground, neck and head of the lion, the thigh of the Asura's warrior, the sideway displacement from the Asura's arm to his head and the shoulders of the umbrella bearer. On the lower line: the mace of the Asura.

D′-A = across the chests of the two Gaṇas behind the Devī, along her arms thrown backward, across her head and the warrior above her to the top of the shield of the Asura's warrior.

In the interspace most forms stand across: the bodies of the three Gaṇas behind the Devī, the body of the Devī, her bow, the body of the Asura's warrior; but the arms of the Devī, the arm of the warrior and the Asura's umbrella follow the trend.

Between D′-A and the upper corner the shapes of the Gaṇas also stand across, while the direction of their movements lies with the trend.

A′-D = from the foot of the Asura in the centre, across his left thigh, along the arm of the fleeing man to his shield.
F-d = all through the slant of the fallen warrior's body.

These last two lines mark very strongly the sideway displacement of the Asura and the followers behind him, under the pressure of the Devī's attack.

In this upward trend more forms are carried along with little resistence in their longitudinal sense than in the opposite downward trend, where forms stand across and fall one on top of the other with their broadsides. The onslaught of the Devī comes from above while the resistence of the Asura rises from below, only to be thrown down again to the ground.

There is, between b′-c and the ground, a rhythmic sequence of forms similar to one another, which, by a progression and regression in size, illustrate this, the Asura's rising resistence and his downfall. This sequence is formed by the forward bent knees of four figures: the small Gaṇa with the bow, the Amazon, the Asura and the fallen warrior. Their size and range of movement grow from the Gaṇa to the Asura, where they reach their climax, and then collapse in the legs of the man fallen to the ground. In the broad curve of this collective movement, each of the three last figures forms a triangle with one side rising and the other falling, and all three taken together form a bigger triangle with the same upward trend on the right and downward trend on the left side.

The line A′-D ends in the hollow of the shield of the retreating warrior. This shield, at the extreme left of the panel and of the Asura's circle is the point of convergence and the recipient of all lines of stress driving towards that part from above and from below. The pressure of all movements pushing towards the left side is collected in the shield which is the culminating point of the unbroken circular sweep, made up of the three warriors one above the other and of the two shields between them.

In the midst of this intricate pattern of violent movements, the Devī, small though she is in comparison with the Asura and his warriors, stands out as a central, dominating figure. This is due to the position and carriage of her body, which is in deliberate opposition to all others. While the others are swept away in an oblique slant, her figure remains aligned in the vertical and the horizontal, the two directions which denote equipoise and stability. Thus she appears as a separate, independent entity, in spite of the fact that she is harmoniously woven into the pattern of the composition. Her figure, from head to foot, is the most conspicuous vertical, and her outstretched arms are the most conspicuous horizontal in the whole composition. Since all verticals and horizontals with their stabilizing power are incorporated in the Devī's figure, she conveys, in spite of her forward drive, an impression of unassailable firmness. The efficacity and importance of space-direction is here demonstrated with all desirable evidence.

It is curious that in spite of the unsymmetrical appearance of the composition and its heterogeneous form-elements, it is governed from end to end by a strict inherent order. Unsuspected at first sight, the bigger form-complexes reveal, on closer analysis, a studied equivalence and balance, while between the smaller forms this correspondence reaches the point of a regular symmetry. This is shown in such details as the juxtaposition of the two fighting men in the top centre, in the symmetrical disposition of the Devī's and the Asura's umbrellas, and in the complementary slant of the two different figures, the Gaṇa and the warrior, in the two uppermost corners. It is visible also in the Devī's sword and the Asura's club, which with their complementary slants are occupying symmetrical positions in the composition. Neither of them is conform to any of the dominating directions. Both are deviating at the same angle from the horizontal in opposite directions.

INTEGRATION

In this panel of the battle between Durgā and the Mahiṣāsura the two lateral circles overlapping one another in the middle are each apportioned to one of the contending forces. But although they are slung into one another, they are separate form-complexes of an entirely different character. The Devī's circle has a perpendicular axis and is composed of a number of small rounded form-elements, feminine in character and scattered in an apparently haphazard way. The Asura's circle has an oblique axis and is composed of bigger, angular, masculine form-elements, disposed in an apparently more systematic manner around the central figure. Under such circumstances one would expect the side of the Asura to triumph with ease over the side of the Devī. But the contrary is the case, demonstrating synoptically and symbolically how material strength is impotent before the light of the Spirit and how brute force can never triumph over divine powers.

The actual clash does not take place between the two main figures, who are still at a certain distance from one another and are only just preparing to strike. The clash takes place between the two warriors of the vanguard in the upper centre. Their two shields, crashing into one another, form the line of division between the two sides. Below these the man falling head downwards opens a neutral gap between the two centres of energy. The two antagonists face one another in attitudes of utmost tension, but the tension of each one is of an entirely different nature.

The energy of the Asura is earth-bound, heavy, tāmasic, relying on size, weight and brutal strength. He is stamping and snorting and grinding his teeth. The energy of the Devī is effortless, imponderous and swift, penetrating as arrows or as rays of light. Her arms indeed resemble unconquerable, all-pervading rays, dispelling the clouds of darkness.

The Asura's energy and that of his followers originates from the ground. His effort is from below upwards, but after reaching a certain height, it is dashed to the ground again. It has two movements, up and down. The Devī's trajectory comes from above and has no break or deflection. She does not touch the ground but sweeps down on the Asura in one straight line.

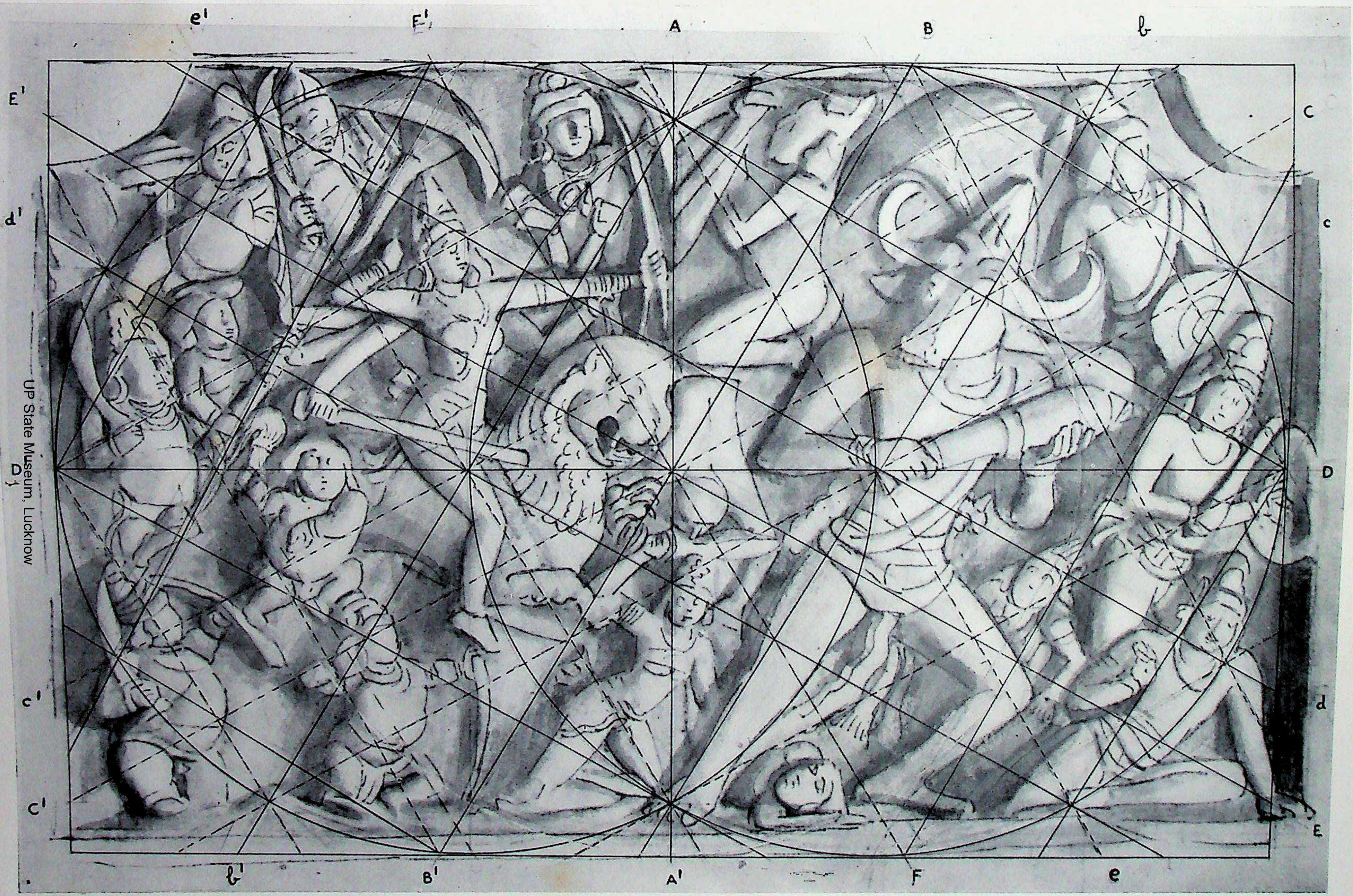
The slant of the Asura's body from right foot to crown, and the slant of the long umbrella-staff behind the Devī are parallel. Yet, while on the Devī's side it denotes a forward pressing movement, on the Asura's side, despite resistance, it denotes retreat. Along the same oblique lines the Gaṇas are falling upon him. Under this impact he is giving way, and the parallel slants of the fleeing and falling warriors behind him show how the struggle will end. These parallels throughout the panel give the impression of a cornfield swept by storm, when all the ears are laid low in one single bend.

In spite of all their fighting equipment the Asuras are, as if bereft of inner strength and fire. The Gaṇas, although with fewer weapons, with childlike figures and apparently inadequate fighting power, are joyful followers in the wake of the Devī's triumphant advance. Their strength is of a different nature. Just as the Devī's energy is of the eternal Spirit, theirs is the invincibility of purity and innocence. Material power is unable to resist the graceful onslaught of her fiery energy and the advance of her playful, buoyant army.

In the larger prospect of universal manifestation the two eternally antagonistic principles, the divine and the asuric, are inextricably interwoven. The one does not exist without the other, and their eternal warfare is but the expression of their mutual necessity. The unending struggle between these two incommensurable powers and the alternating prevalence of one over the other constitutes the evolution of the cosmic process, in creation, duration and dissolution.

Although there is a sharp dividing line through the middle of this panel, which confines each of the two contending groups into a separate field, the fundamental scheme of the three circles slung into one another and embracing them both, graphically demonstrates the essential and unalienable interconnection between the two. Their respective circles project their curves into the opposite camp, and reciprocally appropriate some portion of the other to their own sphere of action. The oblique diameters of the different circles align themselves into parallel trends, which, although working with different connotations, betray their fundamental relationship and interdependence. The differentiation between the parallels of both the opposite form-complexes arises from their reversed position with respect to the centre, with the result, that what has a positive connotation on one side has necessarily a negative connotation on the other, as already explained in the detailed analysis. The positive and negative currents are complementary and necessary to one another. They activate one another, and it is the very tension produced by their antagonism that sustains the perpetual flux and reneval of the world-process.

Thus the diametrically opposite form-elements of the two groups, which on the structural, physical plane could never produce an integrated whole, are, on the transcendental plane, interwoven into a perfect unity by the three interlinked circles, which together constitute the symbolic figure of the Brahmaṇḍa, the Cosmic Egg, that circumscribes the totality of Manifestation.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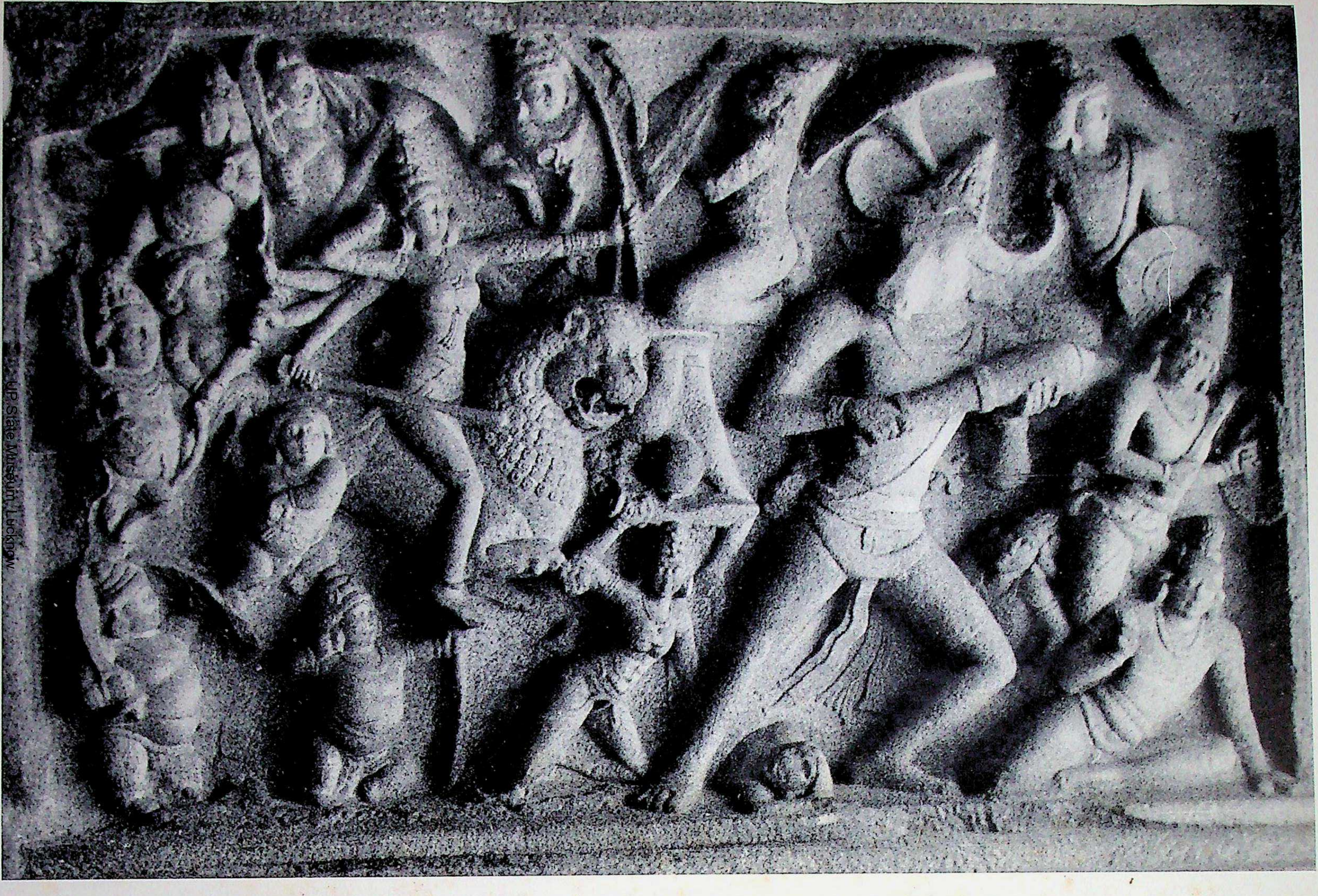
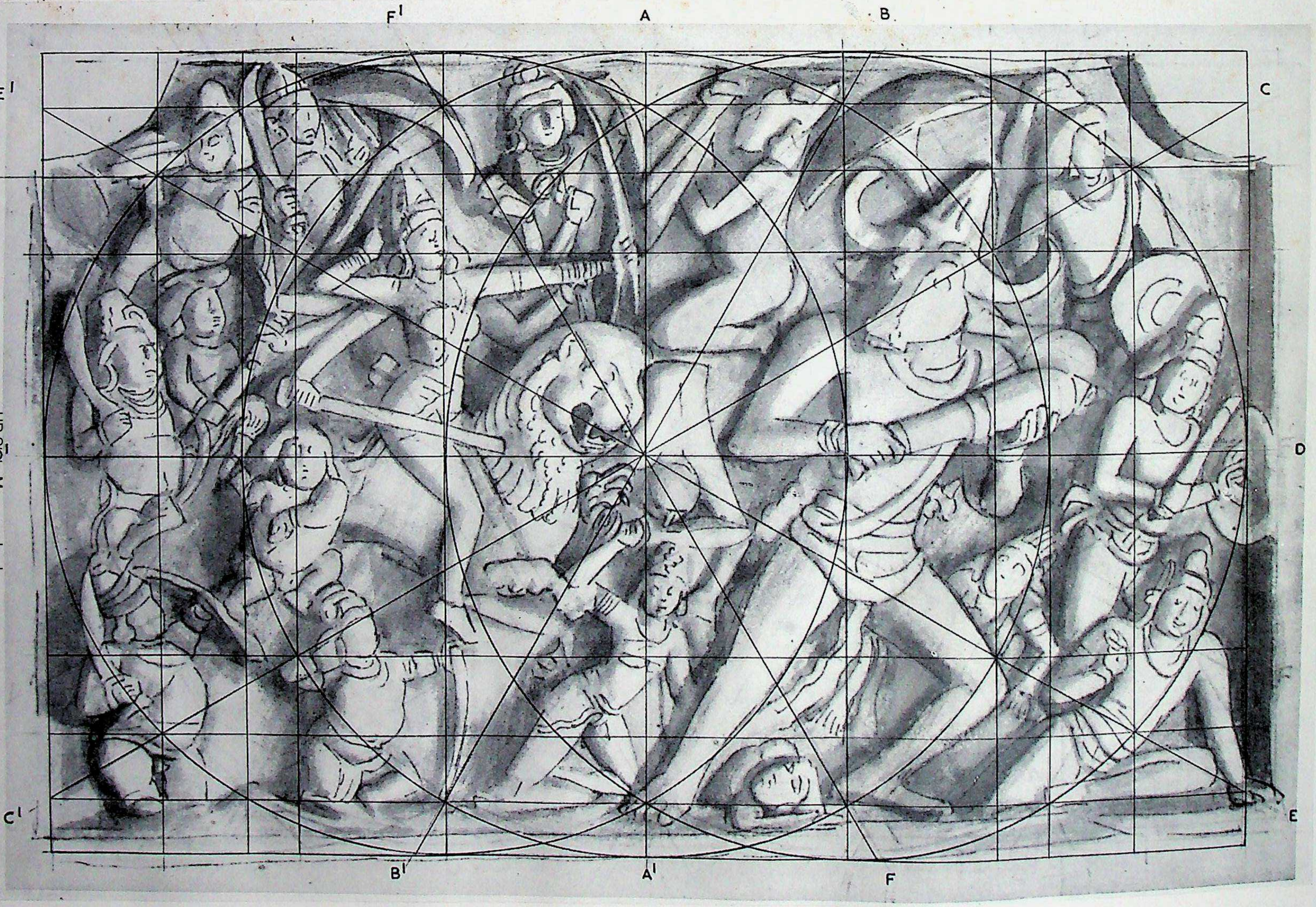
b. TIME DIVISION



MAHIṢĀSURAMARDINĪ, MAHĀBALIPURAM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a. SPACE DIVISION

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The sculptures presented in this volume are only a few amongst a host of others in the ancient Brāhmanical Cave-temples, whose composition is consistently based on a concentric space-organization. If we have refrained from adding any further examples to the present study, it is because we thought that the number of those described would be sufficient to give a fair idea of the principles involved in their outlay. The schemes of composition analysed in these pages have revealed an abstract symbolism corresponding to various aspects of the divinities, characterized by their actions and attributes, that was contained ab initio in the very lines of their outlay, and that it was by a precise juxtaposition and interweaving of the illustrative elements with these fundamental patterns that the final striking synthesis was found. For penetrating deeper into a symbolically significant texture of such complexity, we feel, it is not so much a multiplication of examples that would be needed at present, but rather a further and more penetrating elaboration of single analyses.

Such analyses as we have in mind, would, however, involve a far greater amount of text-studies on the meaning of the different images than the frame-work of the present study would allow. In order to exhaustively analyse the multifarious relations and subtle variations occurring between representations of the same divinity and to elucidate their doctrinal and theological significance, all available textual authorities would have to be collated, an enormous piece of work in itself. Then only would it be possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty, in how far the pattern of composition constitutes an abstract, condensed expression of the inner meaning of any image.

The tentative interpretations given by us here and there never propounded to be the only true and valid ones, because symbolism in any sphere can be envisaged from various points of vision and levels of reference. Their main object was to suggest some possibilities of interpretation, and to evoke others, in the hope of gradually rediscovering the symbol-value of all elements contained in these sacred images. When exploring their inner significance on the basis of their compositional patterns, we first of all based the analysis on the elements given by traditional Iconography, and we discovered to our great satisfaction that the iconographic data and attributes of the figures integrated themselves quite naturally and logically into these patterns, without any violence having to be done to them. It is from this fact that we gained the conviction that the compositional set-up of any given image represents a kind of fundamental yantra, and that therefore its investigation would be an enormous help in getting at the true symbolism of its conception and all its form-elements.

The worship of images had a far deeper significance in ancient times than it has to-day. The reassessment of the basic symbolism and the rediscovery of the lost meaning of many of these ancient images is an urgent task for the better understanding of Hindu art. To retrieve the true significance and to restore to images the dignity of their esoteric symbolism a knowledge is required, however, that might be accessible only to those who have had the privilege of being born and brought up within the ambit of their tradition.

In connection with this we would like to point out another question, which could not even be adumbrated in the present work, but which appears to us to have a very great importance. We mean the order in which the sculptures of the Cave-temples are aligned in one single hall, their relationship to one another and to the main divinity in the sanctuary. The architectural plan of the rock-cut temples follows criteria different from those prevalent in constructed temples, and so does the disposition of their images. While in constructed temples the images are distributed mainly over the outer walls, according to space-directions and according to their esoteric relationship to the main divinity, here they are aligned along the inner side- and backwalls in one continuous row, calling to mind the stations of a processional path, and, as we proceed from the outer, well-lighted ones to the inner ones in semi-darkness, they suggest the idea, that they may be tracing a certain process of initiation and realization, leading from the outer light of the world to the inner light of the spirit.

This difference is certainly not accidental, nor can it be necessitated by material or technical contingencies, the rock being amenable to all types of architectural figurations. The primary reason for the order in which they stand must therefore be searched elsewhere.

Considering the grandeur and importance of these rock-cut monuments and the splendour of their imagery, it appears rather strange that so little is known historically about their origins and the use to which they were dedicated. The first baffling question is this: Why were temples excavated in the body of the mountain at all, when they could have just as well been built up from stones quarried from the mountain? By the time the Brāhmanical Cave-temples were excavated, construction in stone was well developed, and the interior of the caverns is actually fashioned in imitation of constructed halls. They are squared out with pillars and pilasters, showing the normal order of base, shaft and capital supporting a ceiling on imitation brackets and architraves, all carved from the rock. In the Buddhist caityas they are formed into flying vaults supported by an imitation of wooden ribs, also carved from the stone. There is no attempt anywhere to evolve an independent style of rock-architecture. On the contrary: The later Cave-temples at Elūrā, like the Kailāsanātha or the Chota Kailāsa of the Jainas are detached from the mother rock and shaped like constructed temples. Even earlier shrines like the Rathas of Mahābalipuram, carved from huge, freestanding monoliths are faithful imitations of constructed Dravidian temples.

What was then the reason, that during certain periods everywhere in India Cave-temples came into being, which alternately served all the prevailing faiths, the Buddhist as well as the Brāhmanical and the Jaina? Some have argued that caverns afforded better protection against heat and torrential rains than constructed edifices, others have calculated that, on the whole, to excavate a shrine from the mountain involved less labour and expenses than to carry stones from the mountain and to build it up. Even if there be a part of truth in these arguments, it is hardly conceivable that calculations of this kind could provide sufficient incentive and inspiration for the creation of monuments of such unique significance; nor that such utilitarian considerations would carry much weight with people who, as all monuments sufficiently attest, never grudged discomfort, labour and expenses, when they set their heart on building sanctuaries for their gods. The reason must lie deeper. Should an explanation not be rather looked for in some special function that these temples hidden in the rock had to fulfil? It should be remembered that all these caves were in inaccessible places, far away from towns, either excavated in the open flanks of mountains, like Elūrā, Bādāmī, Karle, Bhājā and a host of others, or hidden away in lonely valleys or in deep ravines, like Bāgh and Ajantā. Thus they could not possibly be temples for displaying royal munificence and splendour, nor for serving the ordinary daily worship of common people.

Their purpose must have been of a higher and more exclusive order.

The Buddhist caves bear evidence of having been regular monasteries, since their inner walls have cells, sometimes closed by heavy stone-doors turning on hinges. It is not difficult to imagine that the monks who lived in such a wilderness, locked up in the heart of the mountain, were those who followed the most rigorous discipline and were striving after the highest spiritual attainments. Monasteries of this kind were in all probability centres of an intense spiritual life, exalted by seclusion and kept confined within a closed circle of adepts.

The Brāhmanical Cave-temples in Elūrā, which are of a later date, have very few cells for living, and thus could not have sheltered large communities, but only single individuals, leading a life of renunciation. Their most striking features are the colossal sculptures that line their inner walls and follow one another from the entrance right up to the dark inner shrine at the bottom of the cavern. The character and order of succession of these images, however, representing various aspects and manifestations of the gods, raises a real problem. On one side of the hall the images are Vaiṣṇava and on the opposite wall they are exclusively Śaiva, but there is no apparent inner connection between the two sides. What the various Avatāras of Viṣṇu and the different Līlas of Śiva are standing for, why they are placed in a certain order and not otherwise, what may be the correspondences between the Śiva and Viṣṇu images facing one another has never been investigated. In the ignorance in which we find ourselves to-day as to their intrinsic symbolism, we can only make a guess and ask ourselves, whether they might not have represented various stages on the sādhaka's path, through which he had to go in order to reach his goal? Perhaps they were the stations of his meditations which marked the progress of his inner evolution and advance, step by step, towards the realization he was striving for, the realization of his identity with the ineffable Presence, whose symbol stood hidden in the darkness of the innermost shrine? Although we do not know to-day what stages in the progress of sādhanā the single images may have represented, still their uncanny power and the awe-inspiring atmosphere of these Cave-temples give the feeling that they were created and pervaded by a spirit that far transcended simple devotion, and that these must indeed have been sanctuaries of singular spiritual ascendency.

In this connection we may shortly recall the general symbolism inherent in the idea of Mountain and Cavern, which found such a remarkable exposition in a series of articles by René Guénon, published in the "Études Traditionnelles" of 1937 and 1938. According to Guénon, both Mountain and Cavern are specific symbols for spiritual centres, but with different connotations and at different times. The Mountain, considered as the Meru, or axis and pole of the universe, represented the common spiritual centre for all mankind in primordial times, in the so-called Satya Yuga or Golden Age, when divine knowledge was accessible to all. The summit of the Mountain then corresponded to the Satya-loka, the abode of Truth. In later times, however, when the light of revealed Truth became gradually obscured, when finally it had to hide and go under cover, and individual initiation for those who aspired to knowledge became necessary, the Cavern became not only the symbol, but the actual refuge for spiritual centres that could impart such initiation.

The Cavern, in its ultimate sense, represents the cavern of the heart, the innermost centre of every being, where the Ātman or Puruṣa resides, and where the spiritual rebirth takes place of those who have entered upon the path of reintegration. Every rebirth, however, has to be preceded by a descent into the dark limbo of the psychic underworld, where the unclean residues of sāṁsāric existence have to be exhausted and consumed. Caverns, therefore, represent both death and resurrection, death to the world, and resurrection in the spirit. Caverns have been centres of initiation in all ancient cultures, in Crete, Egypt, Greece, Etruria etc., and the possibility that this was their function also in ancient India cannot a priori be discounted. They made their appearance during dramatic phases of the religious and spiritual life in India, once during the emergence of the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism, and then again during the time when the Brāhmanical faith had a powerful revival and reasserted its supremacy, reabsorbing a dying Buddhism. May it then not be that during the incipient stages of such enormous spiritual upheavals the new doctrines were elaborated in these secluded places, hidden from the common man, till they had sufficiently developed and been formulated in clear enough terms to be able to step out into the world?

The very fact that the origin and use of these Cave-temples, both Buddhist and Brāhmanical, is still covered by a veil of mystery, and less is known about them than about most contemporary temple structures, appears as a further indication that they might in their time have been the repositories and preservers of secret, esoteric doctrines and traditions. Within the closed communities that had become their custodians, such traditions were then reborn in a new form to suit a new age and new needs.

Although considerations of this nature are somewhat outside the scope of the present study, they could not be entirely eschewed. The very character of these Cave-temples, together with the as yet unfathomed symbolism of their imagery, conjured up an esoteric background that we could not overlook, even at the risk of having to raise more questions than could possibly be answered. We did not think fit to suppress speculative thoughts of this kind, because we entertain the hope, that they might in due time provoke further research on this line. For this purpose, however, the mapping out of the historical scene, of the political and sociological configuration of an epoch will not suffice. Such research will have to probe courageously into the depths of the emotional, religious and spiritual currents that constituted its real life. Because there alone, in that profound and vital underlying Reality can the sources of such extraordinary artistic efflorescence be hoped to be found.

GLOSSARY

A.

Abhaya-mudrā — gesture made with raised right hand, palm turned towards the onlooker, signifying: "do not fear!" attribute of many images of deities.

Ādiśeṣa — King of the Nāgas and of the subterrenean regions (Pātāla). He is a serpent with a thousand heads, on which he supports the earth. His body and his hoods are also represented as forming the couch of Viṣṇu and the canopy above his head, when he lies asleep during the interval between creations.

Aditi — the Infinite, the Boundless, in the Vedas the primordial Mother of the gods, who are therefore called Ādityas.

Ādya-Śakti — first, primary Śakti, the primordial, active female Principle.

Āgama — (āgama = to come near, to approach, to attain). Doctrine suited to the Kali-yuga, the present dark age. Its basic conception is: the manifested world is not an illusion, but a reality, produced by the supreme Essence and dependent on it, a play of energies, with which the individual, the jīvātman has to work in order to reintegrate himself into the divine Principle, the Paramātman. The active creative Principle of the Deity is considered as his Śakti, his female counterpart. The scriptures of these doctrines are the Āgamas and Tantras.

Āgamic — referring to the Āgamas.

Agni — Fire, as element; in the Vedas the supreme Life-principle; the god of Fire, who carries the oblations poured into the fire of the sacrifices to the gods; in later times he became the guardian of the South-eastern region, riding on a ram.

Agni-Purāṇa — communicated by Agni, the Fire-god to the Muni Vasiṣṭha. It glorifies Śiva, and contains, amongst its encyclopaedic contents, also some chapters on Śilpa-Śāstra.

Ājñā cakra — the 6th cakra between the two eyebrows, at the meeting point (triveṇī) of the three nāḍis, Suṣumnā, Iḍā and Piñgalā, seat of the subtle mind, of the Ātman in the form of the Praṇava (Oṁ). Ājñā = command (of the Guru) from above. Meditating on this cakra the sādhaka realises his unity with the Brahman, see cakra.

Ākāśa — Ether, in the material and spiritual sense, all-pervading Space.

Akṣamālā — rosary, string of beads, which serves for counting the mantras, when doing japa (repetition of mantras).

Amṛta — nectar of Immortality.

Amṛta-ghaṭaka — vessel containing the nectar of Immortality, in the hands of deities, especially of Brahmā and of Dakṣiṇāmūrti Śiva.

Amṛta-kalaśa — large vessel of Immortality, placed as the crowning of the temple, indicating the aim of spiritual aspiration.

Anāhata — the 4th cakra, in the region of the heart, the seat of Vāyu (air) or Prāṇa (Life-breath), of general movement and the sense of touch. Here resides the embodied ātman (jīva-ātman). He who meditates on this cakra becomes, like Īśvara, able to create and to destroy the worlds, see cakra.

Anala — fire as element.

Ananta — the "Endless", another name of Ādiśeṣa.

Andhakāsura — an Asura, son of Kaśyapa and Diti, who wanted to abduct Pārvatī from Kailāsa, and thereupon was defeated by Śiva. Andha = blind, thus he symbolises spiritual blindness, obscuration of mind.

Antarikṣa — firmament, the intermediate region between earth and heaven; air, atmosphere, sky.

Anugraha — favour, mercy, grace.

Āpa or Āpas — water as element.

Apsaras-pl. Apsarasas — celestial dancers of bewitching beauty, fickle and voluptuous, produced from the Waters at the Churning of the Ocean, wives of the Gandharvas, the musicians of Indra's Court. They were often sent to earth by Indra in order to disturb the penances of great Yogins and Munis.

Āsana — seat, or seated posture, used also for posture in general.

Asura — a-sura (not-god), the same as Daitya and Dānava. In the oldest part of the Vedas it is a name applied to the chief gods, later it took the opposite significance of "enemies of the gods". Although of divine origin, they have fallen from grace through the pursuit of power and other selfish ends.

Ātman — the supra-individual soul, the spirit, the Self, the innermost and undestructible Being that does not die with the body.

Ātma-vidyā — secret knowledge concerning the inner Self or Ātman.

Āvaraṇa-devatās — figures of secondary divinities surrounding the main image of a temple.

Avatāra — 'descent', the descent or manifestation on earth of a divinity for the purpose of rescuing humanity from great evil.

Avidyā — nescience, ignorance, illusion, spiritual blindness, ignorance of the Self.

B.

Bali — Daitya king ruling over the whole earth, but defeated by Viṣṇu in his Dwarf manifestation, called Vāmana Avatāra or Viṣṇu-Trivikrama.

Bhāva — existence, becoming, innate disposition; feeling, emotion, sentiment.

Bhavānī — a name of Śiva's spouse.

Bhṛngī — one of the Śivagaṇas, Śiva's faithful follower, mostly represented as an emaciated ascetic, dancing below Śiva's feet.

Bhū — Earth, the first of the three regions (tribhuvana) Earth, Firmament and Heaven.

Bhū-devī — the Earth-goddess, associated with Viṣṇu, personification of the Earth.

Bhūmi-sparśa-mudrā — gesture of the hand turned downwards, touching the Earth and calling her to witness, particularly of the Buddha after his Illumination.

Bhūpura — the square enclosure surrounding every yantra-diagram. It has four gates in the four directions of space and symbolises the substratum of the earth.

Bhuvar — antarikṣa, firmament, the middle region between earth and sun, the second region of the tribhuvana.

Bīja — seed-corn, germ; mystical seed-letter, containing the essence of a mantra.

Bindu — drop, dot, point having no parts or magnitude; point of intersection of two or more lines; in tāntric doctrines the seed of the Universe.

Brahmā — the first god of the Hindu Trinity, the supreme Spirit manifested as the active Creator of the Universe. Represented of red colour (Rajas), with four heads, seated on a lotus, holding the Vedas, rosary, pitcher and sacrificial ladle in his four hands.

Brahman — the absolute universal Supreme Principle, without attribute or quality.

Brahmabindu — the central point of a diagram or of a plan, also called madhya-bindu.

Brahma-sūtra — the same as madhya-sūtra, the vertical middle-line of any diagram, also the East-West line in a groundplan.

C.

Caitya — Buddhist temple having the form of a basilica.

Cakra — a circle or ring, a discus, a sharp circular missile weapon, which is one of Viṣṇu's emblems; the nerve-centres of the subtle body, also called padma (lotus), described in yogic and tāntric texts. They are inside the spinal column, connected by the Nāḍīs, and direct all faculties of the living being.

Cālukya — dynasty that ruled from 550-753 A.D. over the Southern Deccan, had its capital in Bādāmī, and after conquering the Pallavas, extended its sovereignty up to the Godāvarī and the Narmadā, but was overthrown by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas from the North in 753.

Cāmara — fly-whisk, also called "chowrie", made of the bushy tail of the Bos Grunniens, one of the insignia of Royalty.

Candra — Moon and Moon-god, in paurāṇic Mythology also called Soma as the dispenser of Soma, the nectar of Immortality.

Cidākāśa — ether of Consciousness, the innermost subtle part of the Ātman, where the identity of Ātman and Brahman is realized.

Cinmayā — n. the Devī in the form of pure Consciousness, adj. spiritual, "all intelligence" or "all consciousness" as epithet of a Deity.

Cin-mudrā — gesture of explanation or exposition, tips of thumb and forefinger touching one another, the other fingers stretched.

Cit — Consciousness: Sat (Being), Cit (Consciousness) and Ānanda (Bliss) being the attributes of the Supreme Being: pure Intelligence or Spirit.

Citta — thought, reasoning faculty, attention, aim.

D.

Daityas — fallen or rebel angels, luciferic powers, implacable enemies of the gods, so called because sons of Diti and Kaśyapa, see Asura.

Dakṣiṇa — right, South, favourable.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti — Śiva as World-Teacher, the granter of liberation from worldly bonds.

Ḍamaru — small drum in form of an hour-glass, invariably carried by Śiva, representing nāda = first, primordial, causal sound.

Dānavas — sons of Kaśyapa and Danu, daughter of Dakṣa, the Titans of Hindu Mythology, see Asura.

Daṇḍahasta — in Śiva's dance, arm thrown forward across the body and held straight like a stick or like an elephant's trunk (therefore also called Gaja-hasta). The hand may be held at the height of the hip, or of the shoulder, or above the head, in this latter case not crossing the body.

Darśana — (from dṛś = to see, seeing, looking) vision; going in the presence of; also designation of religious doctrines by the help of which God can be seen or apprehended; a view or theory; the six main religious doctrines in India are called the six darśanas; also inner vision, religious contemplation.

Deva — Deity, angel, a god, but not immortal like the Supreme Principle.

Devatā — the same as Deva, deity, divinity.

Devī — general name of any goddess, particular name of the great Goddess, Mahādevī, the female energy of Śiva, considered by the Śāktas as the supreme Principle, the origin of the manifested world. She may be benign and peaceful, or wrathful and destructive, and according to her aspects assumes different names.
Dharma — code of moral and religious duties; universal Law and order.
Dhyāna — meditation, concentration on the thought of God.
Dikpālas — divine guardians of the four quarters and the four intermediate quarters, who in medieval times were given the names of great Vedic Gods.
Dṛś — to see, to view, to behold, to see by divine intuition.
Durgā — the "Inaccessible", the invincible Goddess constituted by the combined energies of all the gods and endowed with all their weapons, in order to defeat the Asuras, who had usurped the dominion of the world.
Diti — daughter of Dakṣa-Prajāpati, wife of Kaśyapa, Mother of the Asuras, sister of Aditi, Mother of the gods.

G.

Gaja — elephant.
Gajasaṁhāramūrti — image showing the destruction of the Gajāsura (elephant demon) through Śiva.
Gajāsura — a Dānava who took the form of an elephant to abduct Pārvatī from Kailāsa and was destroyed by Śiva.
Gaṇas — hosts of inferior deities, often of grotesque appearance, attending on Śiva and the Devī and always following them.
Gandharvas — celestial musicians at the Court of Indra, of surpassing beauty, often described as seducing human females.
Gaṇeśa — elephant-headed divinity, Lord of the Gaṇas, considered to be the son of Śiva. He is invoked for removing obstacles and conferring prosperity.
Garbha-gṛha — the womb, or innermost sanctuary of a temple, where the image or symbol of the divinity is installed.
Garuḍa — mythical bird, half man half vulture, deadly enemy of the race of snakes (Nāgas), the powerful swiftmoving vehicle of Viṣṇu.
Ghanībhūta-bindu — the bindu pregnant with all life-forces that gives birth to the Universe (āgamic conception).
Guhyakas — hidden beings, class of demi-gods, guardians of Kubera, the god of wealth's treasures.
Guhyavidyā — secret doctrine, secret knowledge.
Guṇa — quality, property, characteristic; the three qualities or tendencies of which all creation is constituted: Sattva = pure, ascending; Tamas = obscure, inert, descending; Rajas = active, expanding. Their symbolic colours are white, black and red.
Gupta-vidyā — the same as Guhya-vidyā.
Guru — spiritual teacher, religious preceptor, initiator.

H.

Haṁsa — Haṁ-saḥ, the in- and outgoing breath, considered as Śiva-Śakti, Puruṣa-Prakṛti etc., the rhythm of life.
Haṁsasya-mudrā — see Cin-mudrā.
Hari — a name of Viṣṇu, meaning: Remover of sin.
Hasta — arm, hand or hand-pose.

Hayaśīrṣa-Pañcarātra — a Vaiṣṇava Āgama (tāntric text)

Hiraṇyagarbha — in Sāṁkhya-doctrine the golden seed, the golden world-egg. In the tāntric conception of World-evolution the third stage in which begins the differentiation of the subtle elements.

Hiraṇya-kaśipu — Daitya King, who ruled over the whole earth and deemed himself to be God; father of Prahlāda, who was Viṣṇu's great devotee.

I.

Icchā-Śakti — the Śakti of desire, in the tāntric conception of World-emanation one of the three Śaktis, into which the Ghanībhūta Bindu divides itself, the other two being Cit-Śakti (ideation) and Kriyā-Śakti (action).

Iḍā-nāḍī — the nāḍī on the left side of Suṣumnā. It is of white colour,feminine, dripping soma or amṛta. It represents the moon (candra). see Nāḍī.

Īkṣaṇa — look, view, sight; Īkṣ = to view, behold, see, think, consider, to see in one's mind.

Indra — in the Vedas the first of the gods, ruler of Heaven and the skies. He rides on an elephant and wields the thunderbolt, he is the god of the clouds, thunderstorm and rain, the deadly enemy of Vṛtra, the demon of drought who withholds the fertilizing rains. Later he became a minor god, the guardian of the Eastern region.

Īśāna — ruler, master, one of the older names (a benign aspect) of Śiva. Later guardian of the North-eastern region, riding on a bull.

Iṣṭa-devatā — tutelary deity, favorite deity, the main deity of a temple, of a person, a family or a sect.

Īśvara — general term for the creator of the Universe. In the Tantras he represents the first creative stir or stress that arises in the changeless Parabrahman; cosmic ideation.

J.

Jāmbavat — King of the bears who helped Rāma in the fight against Rāvaṇa, the Daitya-king of Laṅkā (Ceylon) who had abducted his wife Sītā.

Janaloka — the fifth of the 7 upper lokas or divisions of the Universe, where Brahmā's mind-born sons (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra) and other pious men reside.

Jaṭā — matted hair as worn by the ascetics.

Jatakas — stories relating the previous lives of Gautama Buddha.

Jaṭāmaṇḍala — a circle of matted hair, spread out fanwise, mostly on the heads of images of Bhairava and Kālī.

Jaṭāmukuṭa — a coil of matted and clotted hair, as worn by the ascetics, and especially by Śiva, the Lord of the ascetics.

Jīva — a living being, a creature.

Jīvanmukta — soul liberated while still in the body.

Jīvātman — the individual soul, as distinguished from Paramātman, the supreme, universal Soul.

Jñāna — sacred knowledge, spiritual knowledge, insight attained by meditation.

Jñāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti — Śiva as Yogin, spiritual teacher, as World-Guru, conferring Ātma-vidyā on his devotees and giving them final liberation.

Jñāna-mārga — the way of contemplation, of meditation and sādhanā, for attaining spiritual knowledge, as distinct from the way of works: pūja, sacrifice and yoga.

Jyotir-liṅgam — liṅgam of light of infinite extension, in which form Śiva appeared to Brahmā and Viṣṇu, who acknowledged his supremacy.

K.

Kailāsa — mountain in the Himālaya sacred to Śiva, the abode of Śiva.

Kailāsanātha — the Lord of Kailāsa, Śiva.

Kaiṭabha — one of the two demons, who slipped from the ears of Nārāyaṇa and attacked him, at the time when a new Creation was arising from his navel, but were destroyed by him. The other demon is Madhu. They are thought to represent Rajo- and Tamoguṇa.

Kālabhairava — the black Bhairava, Śiva in a terrifying, destructive aspect. There are eight different Bhairavas.

Kālācūrī-Dynasty — ruled in central India from 550 A.D. The Maheśmati Kālācūrī were responsible for the excavation of the earliest, purely Śaiva Caves at Elūrā, No. 21 and 29, and probably also for the excavation of the Elephantā-Caves.

Kalpa — a measure of time, lasting from one world-creation to its dissolution. One Kalpa consists of 14 Manvantaras or ages of Manu, together of 432 million human years.

Kamaṇḍalu — an oblong water-pot with a handle and a spout, made of wood, used by ascetics.

Kanyā — young girl, virgin.

Kapāla — bowl made of a human skull, carried by Śiva and Kālī.

Karatāla — a kind of small cymbals used to accompany songs and dance.

Karma — Fate as determined by the consequences of actions performed in a previous existence. Action, work, deed; moral duty, religious act or rite.

Karma-mārga — the way of works, active sādhanā as distinct from contemplative sādhanā.

Kaumodakī — the mace of Viṣṇu, presented to him by Agni, often represented in the personification of a female figure.

Kinnaras — heavenly musicians with human faces and the body of birds (sirens).

Kṣetra — field, ground, building-ground, plane, space, area of any geometrical figure.

Kubera — God of wealth, a Yakṣa, Chief of Yakṣas and Guhyakas, residing on Mount Kailāsa and possessing inestimable treasures of gold, silver and precious stones. Later he became the regent of the Northern region.

Kuṇḍalinī — she who maintains all beings of the world by inspiration and expiration. When at rest, she is represented as a snake coiled around the Svayambhū Liṅgam in the Mūlādhāra cakra, and when aroused, as running up through the Suṣumnā nāḍī to the Sahasrāra.

Kuṭṭitam — a dance-pose, in which one foot rests firmly on the ground, while the other, standing on the toe, strikes the ground with the heel.

L.

Lakṣmī — Vedic Mother-goddess, later Śakti of Viṣṇu, goddess of beauty, fortune and prosperity, also called Mahālakṣmī. In the Tantras one of the ten Mahāvidyās.

Līlā — play, sport, amusement. It is said that the creation of the world is the Līlā of Śiva.

Liṅgam — sign, mark; the phallus, in its specific sense the symbol of Śiva as creative Principle; the subtle body not destroyed by death.

Loka — place, region. There are fourteen different regions in the universe, seven from the earth-region upwards: Bhū, Bhuvar, Svar, Mahar, Jana, Tapas and Satya-lokas, of which the last is the abode of Brahmā, and seven below the earth down to Pātāla.

M.

Mādhavī — name of Lakṣmī, as the Beloved of Viṣṇu.

Madhu — see Kaiṭabha.

Madhya-bindu — central point from which emanate all lines of a diagram, the same as Brahma-bindu.

Madhya-prastha — central horizontal middle-line in a diagram.

Madhya-sūtra — central vertical line in a diagram, the same as Brahma-sūtra.

Mahākāla — the Great Time, designation of Śiva, in one of his destructive aspects.

Mahā-māyā — Great Illusion, the unreality of the Universe as contrasted with the reality of the Supreme Spirit, the Puruṣa.

Maharloka — the fourth of the seven upper regions, abode of Bhṛgu and other saintly beings.

Mahāvidyā — supreme knowledge, name of the Śakti as embodiment of supreme Consciousness. Tāntric doctrines mention ten Mahāvidyās.

Mahāyogin — the supreme Yogin, title given to any divinity, but particularly to Śiva, as the holder of divine yogic powers.

Mahiṣāsuramardinī — name given to Durgā, when fighting the Mahiṣāsura or Buffalo-demon.

Makara — aquatic animal resembling a crocodile, vehicle of Varuṇa.

Maṇḍala — circle, orb, circular diagram of symbolic significance.

Maṇḍapa — mukhaśālā, or jagamohana, hall in front of the main shrine of a temple.

Maṇipūra-cakra — third cakra at the navel, the region of Agni (Fire), expansion, seat of the sense of sight, form and colour. By meditating on this cakra power to destroy and to create the world is acquired.

Mantra — sacred verse or syllable, invocation of a divinity, vedic hymn, spell.

Mantrin — knower of mantras and sacred texts, counsellor, minister; wise man.

Manu — the universal Law-Giver, existent from the beginning of the world.

Manvantara — an age of Manu of 4.320.000 years, made up of four yugas.

Māyā — illusion, delusion, unreality; the universe appearing as being separate and distinct from the Supreme Spirit.

Mithuna — a couple of lovers; sexual union.

Mudrā — seal; conventional hand-gestures, expressing facts, feelings and thoughts, used on the stage and for sacred images.

Mukuṭa — high headdress of devatās, head-gear or crown.

Mūlādhāra — the lowest of the six cakras or dynamic centres in the subtle body, between anus and genitals, in which Kuṇḍalinī lies coiled around the Svayambhū Liṅgam, till she is aroused by tapasyā and travels upwards through the other cakras. It is the Earth-centre. Mūla = root; ādhāra = support, root of Suṣumnā, support of Kuṇḍalinī.

Muṇḍamālā — skull-garland worn by Śiva and the Devī, when in their destructive aspects.

Muni — a sage, a seer, an ascetic living in silence.

N.

Nāda — sound, tone, in tāntric doctrines it has the specific meaning of primordial sound-vibration, the first stirring of Creation, (bindu, nāda, bīja).

Nāḍī — nerves of the subtle body, conduits of prāṇik or vital force, connected with the alternate breathing through the right and left nostril. The solar and lunar currents flow through them. Suṣumṇā, Iḍā and Piṅgalā are the chief nāḍīs, in and along the spinal column.

Nāgas — mythical snake-divinities, living in the nether worlds, where they reign in great splendour. The great Śeṣanāga supports the earth on his hoods.

Nāgarāja — the king of Nāgas.

Nāgī — a female Nāga.

Nāma — name, appellation, substance, essence as distinct from rūpa = form.

Nandī — bull-emblem and vehicle of Śiva, emblem of fertility, as well as of Dharma = moral and religious law.

Narasiṁha — Man-lion, a form assumed by Viṣṇu in order to deliver the world from the oppression of Hiraṇyakaśipu, who by the favour of Brahmā had become omnipotent and invulnerable, and wanted to kill his own son Prahlāda because of the latter's devotion to Viṣṇu.

Nārāyaṇa — when, after having reabsorbed the entire Creation into Himself, Viṣṇu rests in deep slumber on the coils of Śeṣanāga, the Great Serpent, in the middle of the Milk-ocean, awaiting to bring forth a new Creation, he is called Nārāyaṇa, (moving or dwelling on the Waters).

Naṭarāja — King of the Dance, designation of Śiva when represented in his cosmic dance of Creation and Destruction.

Nīla — black, another name for Gajāsura, the elephant-demon.

Nīlotpala — the blue lotus.

Nirguṇa — beyond qualities or attributes, designation of the supreme Brahman.

Nirṛti — originally a vedic god, later the guardian of the south-western quarters, of terrifying aspect, riding on the shoulders of a man, personification of death and destruction.

Niṣkriya — without action; immanent aspect of a divinity.

Nivṛtti-mārga — cessation of worldly life, the way of return, of re-integration.

P.

Pallavas — from 400-750 the greatest Power on the South-Eastern coast, always at war with the Cālukyas on the other side of the Deccan. They had their capital in Kāñcipuram, were first Buddhists, then became Śaivas. They were great builders. Four different styles are distinguished in their works. Mahendravarman (600-625) started the excavation of cave-temples. Narasiṁhavarman (Mammalla) (625-45) was the founder of Mammallapuram or Mahābalipuram. They were finally overcome by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of the northwestern Deccan.

Parama-haṁsa — ascetic of the highest order, who has entirely subdued his senses and lives in constant communion with the Supreme.

Parama-śakti — supreme Śakti, supreme female Energy.

Paramātman — supreme Essence, supreme Soul, Brahman.

Paraśu — battle-axe, attribute of Śiva, signifying the destruction of tamo- and rajo-guṇa.

Pariṇāma — transformation, evolution, maturation.

Pārvatī — the daughter of the Mountain, of Himālaya, one of the names of Śiva's spouse in her peaceful, benign aspect.

Patāka-hasta — streamer-pose, the extended hand stretched out away from the shoulder.

Pātāla-loka — the lowest of the seven subterrenean regions, over which reigns the great Nāga Vāsuki.

Paurāṇic — relating to Purāṇas.

Piṅgalā-nāḍī — Nāḍī to the right of Suṣumnā, of red colour, masculine, of the fiery nature of Agni or Rudra, representing the sun (Mihira), see Nāḍī.

Prabhā-maṇḍala — a circle or halo of light, an aureole.

Pradakṣiṇā — circumambulation of a sanctuary, a divine image, a holy tree or also of a person, in sign of devotion.

Prahlāda — son of the Dānava King Hiraṇyakaśipu, persecuted by his father on account of his devotion to Viṣṇu, but rescued by the latter in his man-lion form (Narasiṁha).

Prajāpati — "Lord of creatures", progenitor, originally epithet of several vedic gods, afterwards of a separate god, presiding over procreation and bestowing progeny and cattle; creator. In the Brāhmaṇas identified with Brahmā as the original, self-existent Being or source out of which the Universe was evolved. The Ṛṣis, as progenitors of the human race, are also called Prajāpatis.

Prakṛti — in the Sāṁkhya doctrine nature as distinct from spirit = Puruṣa; world substance, source of the material universe.

Pralaya — world dissolution, preceding a new creation or emanation, at the end of a kalpa.

Prāṇa — life-breath, universal and individual, vital air, inspiration and expiration. There are five Prāṇas: prāṇa, apāna, samāna, udāna, vyāna.

Prāṇa-cakra — anāhata-cakra, centre of vāyu, prāṇa, centre of the Life-breath in the chest.

Pratibimba — reflexion, as in a mirror.

Pratīka — outward form, appearance, image, symbol.

Pratimā — image, likeness, picture, figure.

Pravartita-hasta — hand turned backward on the raised forearm (pravartana = cause to turn, to revolve, to go round).

Pravṛtti-mārga — active and worldly life, working and enjoying pleasures of life; spiritual darkness, as opposed to nivṛtti mārga, the way of renunciation, and final emancipation from worldly bonds.

Pṛthivī — earth as substance and as personified goddess.

Purāṇa — ancient encyclopaedic texts, describing the creation and destruction of the universe, the genealogy and feats of Gods and Patriarchs, of Ṛṣis, ascetics and heroes, the reigns of the Manus (Lawgivers), the history of the solar and lunar and other races of Kings etc. There are eighteen main Purāṇas.

Puruṣa — Supreme Soul, or creative Spirit, the Spiritual Principle as distinct from Prakṛtī, the material substratum of Creation; also the Innermost, the Ātman.

R.

Rāga — affection, emotion; musical modes expressing certain emotions and feelings, each one being made up of certain specific notes and intervals. There were originally six fundamental rāgas and thirty rāginis derived from them.

Rajoguṇa — of the three guṇas it is the quality of expansiveness, activity, the driving power animating both Sattva- and Tamoguṇa; see Guṇa.

Ramā — a name of Lakṣmī.

Rāṣṭrakūṭa — a dynasty of kings, who overthrew and succeeded the Cālukyas in the Western Deccan and had their residence in Malkhed. The Kailāsanātha Temple in Elūrā is a creation of the Cālukya King Kṛṣna II (757-783).

Ṛgveda — the first and most important of the four Vedas, consisting of great hymns to the Aryan gods, Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Uṣas etc.

Ṛṣi — the ancient Seers, superhuman beings, to whom the Vedas were revealed at the beginning of Time; those who first "saw" the Vedas, commonly assumed to be seven, are also considered as the fathers of the human race.

Rudra — in the Vedas the devouring, terrible form of Agni. Later it became the name of Śiva in a destructive aspect.

Rūpa — form, shape, nature, as distinct from nāma = name and essence.

S.

Sādhaka — person doing sādhanā, spiritual exercises, striving towards perfection.

Sādhanā — spiritual exercises directed towards the attainment of final liberation from worldly bonds.

Saguṇa — possessed of qualities and attributes.

Sahasrāra — the highest cakra, the thousand-petalled lotus on top of the cranium.

Sakriya — with action; creative aspect of a divinty.

Samādhi — last stage of yogic concentration in which consciousness of the outer world is entirely lost and supreme bliss is experienced in the feeling of identity with God.

Sāmarasya — balance of equal powers.

Sāmaveda — third of the Vedas, consisting of metrical hymns chanted to the gods. See Veda.

Saṁsāra — world, universe, mundane existence, worldly illusion.

Saṁsāra-cakra — wheel of the universe, wheel of existence, as opposed to pure Being which belongs to God alone.

Saṁskāra — impressions in the memory; disposition, faculty, capacity acquired in previous existences and stored in the subconscious; consecration, sanctification, initiation through sacred rites and ceremonies.

Samudra-manthana — the Churning of the Milk-ocean by the Devas and the Asuras, when they used the mountain Mandara as the churning-stick and the serpent Vāsuki as the churning rope, in order to distil the elixir of Immortality.

Sapta-mātṛkās — the seven Mothers, in the paurāṇic and tāntric conception the female energies of seven gods, helping Śiva and the Devī in the destruction of evil, sometimes impersonations of these very evils which they have absorbed.

Sarasvatī — Goddess of Speech, of Learning and of the Arts, Śakti of Brahmā.

Sattvaguṇa — of the three guṇas the ascending tendency, the quality of truth and purity, see Guṇa.

Satyaloka — the highest of the 14 regions of the universe, the abode of Brahmā, corresponding to the Sahasrāra in human beings.

Siddhāntadīpikā — (the light of Siddhānta), commentary on the Siddhānta-muktāvalī by Nāna-dīkṣita. The latter means "string of pearls of dogmatic precepts".

Siddhāsana — Yoga-seat in which the crossed feet lie with upturned soles on the thighs.

Siddhi — supernatural powers acquired by sādhanā and Yoga.

Soma — nectar of immortality, the beverage of the gods, the juice distilled from a plant which was the most important ingredient in vedic sacrifices; the watery substance of the universe. Later also a designation of the moon.

Spandana — pulsation, throbbing, tremor, quickening, vibration.

Sphuraṇa — breaking forth, bursting out, flashing, springing up.

Sṛṣṭi-sthiti-saṁhāra — creation, maintainance and dissolution of the universe.

Sthānamūrti — a freestanding image, not carved in the wall, used as object of worship inside the garbha-gṛha of the temple.

Sthapati — traditional architect and sculptor.

Sūci-hasta — hand-pose with extended index, pointing downward.

Sudāman — name of a legendary mountain.

Sudarśana — name of Viṣṇu's cakra.

Sudhā — ambrosia, nectar, amṛta, Soma.

Sūrya — the sun, name of the Sun-god.

Suṣumnā — the central and greatest Nāḍī in the spinal column, through which Prāṇa (Kuṇḍalinī) is rising from the Mūlādhāra cakra to the Sahasrāra. Idā and Piṅgalā indicate Kāla or Time, but Suṣumnā devours Time. On its path entry is made into timelessness.

Sutala — the third region of the nether worlds, ruled by Bali.

Svadhā — invocation used in offering oblations to the manes (pitṛ).

Svādhiṣṭhāna — second cakra between mūlādhāra and navel, the region of Varuṇa, of the Waters, of white colour; contraction, seat of the sense of taste. He who meditates on this cakra becomes free from egoism and passions, a Lord among Yogins.

Svāhā — invocation used in offering oblations to the gods.

Svar or Svarga — heaven, region between the sun and the polestar (Dhruva)

Svarūpa — one's own form or essence, innate character or constitution.

Svastika — cross with equal arms whose ends are bent in one direction, so as to suggest a rotatory movement, ancient symbol of the sun and the revolution of the universe.

Ś and Ṣ (SH).

Śabda — sound, word, significant word.

Śaiva — referring to Śiva; a worshipper of Śiva.

Śākta — worshipper of Śakti, the Female Energy as the Supreme Principle of the Universe.

Śakti — power, energy, the active principle of a deity, regarded as his female part; designation of the Devī.

Śaṅkha — conch-shell, one of the emblems of Viṣṇu.

Śārdūla — mythical animal resembling a lion.

Śārṅga — name of Viṣṇu's bow.

Śāstra — treatise, scripture, sacred book.

Ṣaṭkoṇa — six-edged star, hexagram, symbol of Śiva-Śakti in Sāmarasya.

Śeṣanāga — see Ādiśeṣa (śeṣa = the rest, the remainder).

Śikhara — head or spire of the temple.

Śilpa-śāstra — treatise on the figurative arts and crafts: architecture, sculpture and painting, as also on carpentry, mechanics, weaving, pottery, goldsmith-work and all other handicrafts.

Śilpin — artisan, artist, craftsman, an expert in any of the arts and crafts.

Śiva — "the Auspicious", the merciful god of the creative principle, in this aspect also called Śankara, Bhava, Viśvanātha (Lord of the universe), Mahādeva (great god) etc. In the Hindu Trinity he is the third god and is looked upon also as the god of destruction under the names of Rudra (the howler) Bhairava, Vīrabhadra, Mahākāla etc.

Śivagaṇa — see Gaṇa.

Śivamahāpurāṇa — Purāṇa glorifying Śiva and relating all the innumerable legends which have been woven around his figure.

Śrīmadbhāgavata — Purāṇa dealing mostly with the life of Kṛṣṇa.

Śruti — what is heard, the primordial Revelation, *i.e.*, the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, in distinction to Smṛti, what was recorded and remembered, the doctrines derived from the Śruti.

Śukrācārya — the Guru of the Dānavas, especially of King Bali.

Śūnyatā — emptiness, Non-existence, vacuity; the realization of the emptiness of all existence and, by implication, of the reality and fullness of the supreme Being.

T.

Tamoguṇa — quality of inertia and darkness, the descending tendency, see Guṇa.

Taṇḍava — dance of Śiva, of a manly, forceful, even violent character, the dance of destruction and creation.

Tantra — (tantra = loom, warp, thread). Scriptures of the āgamic doctrines, mostly in the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Śakti.

Tapasyā — religious austerity, penance.

Tapoloka — the second highest region of the universe, where deified Virāgins reside.

Tarjanī-hasta — hand-pose with extended index pointing upward, implying admonition or threat.

Tattva — primary subtle elements; categories in the evolution of the universe, proceeding from subtle essence to the constitution of material or gross form.

Tejas — Fire, the burning essence of Fire.

Tirobhāva — disappearance, illusion, veiling in the veil of Māyā.

Tribhanga — a pose in which the body has three sideway bends, the first from feet to hip, the second from hip to shoulder, the third from shoulder to crown.

Tribhuvana — the three worlds or cosmic regions: Earth, Firmament and Heaven.

Tripatāka-hasta — gesture of the arm, according to Naṭya-śāstra: upper arm lifted horizontally as high as the shoulder, forearm reversed, palm of the hand bent upwards at right angles to the forearm, hand with four fingers stretched and erect, the ring-finger down, the whole is a constanct adjunct to the daṇḍa-hasta.

Tripurasundarī — name of the Devī in her aspect as universal Creative Energy, represented as a young girl of sixteen, of ruddy complexion, holding noose, bow, five arrows and lotus.

Triśanku — King of the solar race, father of Hariścandra, whom Viśvāmitra wanted to raise to heaven, while still in his body, as a reward for his sacrifices. But his entry being opposed by Indra, he remained suspended between heaven and earth.

Triśūla — trident weapon carried by Śiva, the three points sometimes considered to represent the three guṇas.

Trivikrama — the same as Vāmana-avatāra, dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu. By three steps covering earth, heaven and the underworlds, he defeated the Daitya King Bali and restored the dominion of the earth to the gods.

U.

Upaniṣad — see Veda.

V.

Vāhana — vehicle, mostly used to designate the vehicles of the gods.

Vaiṣṇava — relating to Viṣṇu; worshipper of Viṣṇu.

Vāmanāvatāra — the same as Trivikrama, so called because Viṣṇu appeared to Bali in the form of a dwarf (vāmana).

Vanamālā — garland of wood-flowers of variegated colours, worn by Viṣṇu.

Vanaspati — Lord of the forest, a great tree, the world-tree, or axis of the universe.

Varada mudrā — hand gesture in which the arm is lowered and the open palm is turned downward towards the spectator, signifying the bestowing of boons.

Varāha-avatāra — Boar manifestation of Viṣṇu, in which he raised the Earth from the bottom of the sea, where she had been submerged by the Daitya Hiraṇyākṣa.

Varuṇa — in the Vedas a personification of the sky, equivalent to Uranos, supreme deity, King of the universe. Later he became the god of the ocean and the rivers, and as such he is the guardian of the western quarters, riding on a makara, holding noose and pitcher.

Vāyu — air, wind; in the Vedas the wind-god, said to have sprung from the breath of Puruṣa, a god associated with Indra, later the regent of the north-western quarters, riding on an antelope; also Prāṇa = life-breath.

Veda — the most ancient divine knowledge revealed by Brahmā to the Ṛṣis. Originally there were three Vedas, the Ṛg, and the Yajus, the Sāma to which later the Atharva was added. They are collections of prayers and hymns in metrical verse addressed to the various gods. Included in the designation of Veda are also the Brāhmaṇas, treatises on the ritual of sacrifices, and the Upaniṣads, metaphysical and philosophical speculations on the ultimate Truth. Together they constitute the primordial Revelation on which the whole edifice of Hindu religion and metaphysics is based.

Vidyā — knowledge, science, wisdom, spiritual insight.

Vidyādhara — "holder of knowledge", name of inferior deities floating between earth and heaven, represented as holding the sword of knowledge (discrimination) or the garland of victory.

Vighneśa — "Lord of obstacles", name of Gaṇeśa as the remover of obstacles.

Vimāna — main body of the temple, temple-spire.

Virāṭ — the totality of created beings, natura naturata; in the evolution of creation it is the stage of differentiation of the gross elements.

Vismaya-hasta — gesture expressing wonder, one hand is raised with outspread fingers and the back of the hand turned towards the beholder.

Viṣṇu — in the Hindu trinity of gods, he is the Preserver. His avatāras (descents) or manifestations, of which there are ten, happened periodically to save the world when some great evil threatened to destroy it.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa — a Purāṇa of the Vaiṣṇavas, which centres around the legends of Viṣṇu, and in which Viṣṇu is considered the supreme divinity, or rather the supreme Principle.

Viśuddha-cakra — fifth cakra at the throat, space-giving, the seat of hearing. Its element is ether, it is the abode of the Devī of Speech, the seat of all the vowels and of the seven fundamental notes. It is the gateway of the Great Liberation for the pure.

Viśvarūpa — the universal form of any god, especially of Viṣṇu, showing the whole creation established in his body; wearing all forms, omnipresent, omnipotent.

Viśvarūpiṇī — the Śakti in her creative aspect, in distinction to Cidrūpiṇī where she is in her aspect as pure Consciousness.

Vyākhyāna-mudrā — see Cin-mudrā.

Y.

Yajña — sacrifice offered to the gods.

Yajñavidyā — the science of sacrifice, teaching all the ceremonial connected with various sacrifices.

Yajñopavīta — sacred thread, emblem of the second, the spiritual birth, conferred in an initiatory ceremony upon members of the three upper casts.

Yakṣa — formerly designation of the great world-creator, equivalent to Puruṣa or Prajāpati, in later times yakṣas became a kind of sylvan deities or nature spirits, attendants on Kubera.

Yama — from vedic times the god of the dead, to whose abode man reaches after death; later also Judge of the dead and guardian of the Southern quarters. As such he is riding on a black buffalo, holding noose and staff; also called Dharmarāja, the upholder of Dharma, moral and religious Law.

Yantra — a geometrical figuration, mystic or symbolic diagram, representing certain aspects of the divine Principle, and used in worship by the followers of the Tantras.

Yoga — union, physical and mental discipline, with control of breath and all other bodily functions, practised in order to attain one-pointed concentration of mind and spiritual union with the Supreme.

Yoga-nidrā — the sleep of contemplation, esp. applied to the sleep of Viṣṇu between one world-creation and the next, personified in the Devī Mahāmāya, the Great Illusion.

Yogin — ascetic practising Yoga, a contemplative saint, a possessor of yogic, spiritual powers, a follower of the Yoga philosophy.

Yoginī — female Yogi, woman practising austerities; female protective divinity associated with the worship of Śakti. There are 64 Yoginīs, found together in temples or in Yantras.

Yoginī Hṛdaya Tantra — a tāntric treatise.

Yuga — an age of the world. There are four Yugas in one cycle of creation: The Satya or Kṛta-yuga, the Tretā Yuga, the Dvāpara Yuga and the Kali Yuga, declining in length and in righteousness from the first to the last. We are in the last, the Kali Yuga.

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